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THE CHANGING FACE OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE*

K. F. QUINN

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The fifth biennial Congress of A.U.M.L.A. at Hobart in February 1957 was the first to take in the Classics. The Association's broadened membership was acknowledged by a change of name and by choosing 'The Classical Heritage' as the theme for the Congress, and the opportunity was taken by many speakers to explore from fresh view-points the complicated pattern of classical influences in modern literature. It is pertinent also, at such a moment, to ask for an assessment of the nature and quality of Greek and Roman literature itself, remembering that the Classics are more than a quarry for tropes, or even ideas or literary forms: the importance of the Classics as an activating force in modern literature should hasten our acknowledgement of the quality of much of the writings of the Greeks and Romans that have come down to us, and quicken our curiosity about it. It is important to meet enquiries for such an assessment of the Classics, not with vague appeals to traditional prestige, nor to judgments of past generations upon whose critical opinions many today would hesitate to rely, but in terms of what we today look for, and what value, in literature. It may serve to indicate how badly re-assessment is needed, and point to some of the issues involved, to take one department of ancient literature where, it seems to me, the ideas of many Classicists are badly out of joint, attempting to show there: firstly, its general shape as I look at it (for I think to describe that will prepare for arguments that follow); secondly, some factors

* Abridgement of an address given at the Fifth Congress of the Association.

that necessitate re-assessment; thirdly, some important new paths along which re-assessment should, it seems to me, proceed.

I

The department of literature I mean I have come to call in my teaching and my thinking 'Roman Personal Poetry'. The term Personal was, perhaps, not well chosen. It is not intended as anything like a synonym of 'autobiographical', and in the 'Personal Heresy' controversy¹ I think I am on the side of Professor C. S. Lewis. I use the term in opposition to the term 'Public' poetry (where epic and tragedy are the principal genres in ancient poetry) to denote those styles where the poet, instead—like the bard and the tragedian—of voicing the public thoughts and attitudes of the community, voices his private attitudes, or surprises his readers into avowal of theirs. Much modern poetry is of this kind. Between it and—say—Milton and Shakespeare there is often roughly that sort of difference that in our daily papers we see between the leading article and the columnist's column. The subject can be the same and the two yet separated by something more fundamental than the familiar critic's tools of form and style can probe.

It is one of those distinctions that might take long to discuss adequately, but I think any of us could easily hazard a good deal about its nature, or about the psychological dichotomy that underlies the literary one. We under-rate the distinction if we talk simply of a difference in 'attitude'. There are two worlds here, the one ennobled and simplified, the other depicted as complicated and with heightened attention to significant trifles. The thoughts and beliefs of some of us dwell so much in one and are so acclimatized to it that the other can seem unhealthy or unreal. Most of us are balanced precariously in a border-land of double-think, offering our allegiances alternately to the Public and the Private poet—as our mood, or his genius, moves us. It is dangerous, artistically, to mix these worlds, as Horace did in those patriotic odes where he attempted to give a Personal form to themes and beliefs of Public literature. Or as Mr Monsarrat does in his novel *The Tribe that Lost its Head*, where, I suggest, the basis of our dissatisfaction is that his heroes (the administrators of the colony) are drawn in the simplifying, heroic style and his villains (the journalists and the native leaders) in the complex, 'psychological' style of Personal literature. The novel might have followed either the manner of C. S. Forrester's novels of the British Navy, or the manner of Graham Greene; it cannot successfully follow both. Either creates

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an illusion, but the illusions, if allowed to mix, are mutually destructive.

The Personal poet is often satirical, but there is little correlation between Personal poetry and satire. Much Roman, and much English, satire is distinctly Public literature. Nor will the distinction between 'serious' and 'familiar' always fit, or that between 'subjective' and 'objective'. Personal poetry can often be called 'subjective', but 'objective' would mislead, for Public literature may take us as far away from objective reality as Personal.

The distinction covers most types of literature. My interest in it, however, is confined to poetry. Horace's *Satires*, for example, are certainly Personal literature, but, like Horace himself,² I should not call them poetry. Even so, it is a classification that in modern literature might be of little use, because it took in so much, and we should not be anxious to add to the jargon of literary criticism. But in Roman literature the term is useful to suggest a kind of overall unity in the poetry written by half a dozen poets during—roughly—the half-century from 60 to 10 B.C.; the last three decades—approximately—of the Republic (including the havoc of the civil wars) and the first two of the period of chaos emerging into order that followed. More precisely: Catullus, the so-called lyric poetry of Horace, the *Eclogues* of Virgil and the minor poems, Propertius, Tibullus and perhaps a third of the poetry of Ovid. A good deal of this is love poetry in the first person, but the term Personal does not depend on this fact. The term is used of the rest of their poetry equally, because the personality of the poet as a conscious literary artist everywhere intrudes, working on his material, however apparently remote from himself, seeking all the time, in the words of a modern poet, to

be subtle, various, ornamental, clever.³

The advantage of grouping all this writing seemed to be that it emphasized that these poets, without in any sense forming a school, evolved a style in poetry that was as characteristically Roman and un-Greek as Roman portraiture in stone, though equally penetrated with Greek influence, was in spirit clearly alien to Greek sculpture. We find it indeed in Greek poetry where, in H. C. Baldry's fine phrase, 'the individual speaks'; but, as Baldry wisely remarks, this poetry among the Greeks was limited in scope and tied to particular occasions, lacking what Roman and modern poetry exploits constantly, self-expression for its own sake.

II

Poetry like this was, until the present century, uncommon in

England since the Metaphysicals. Despite Goethe's pastiche of Propertius in his *Römische Elegien*, there is not much evidence that the Continent found Roman Personal Poetry congenial either. The great genres, tragedy, epic, do not need an age where that style is in fashion in contemporary literature to be at any rate appreciated. But Roman Personal Poetry is without the palpable ingredients of great literature—grandiloquence, pathos, wit—to start the student on the right track; and, with nothing in contemporary literature to give them a notion of shape and quality, classical scholars have strayed further, perhaps, from sense and sensitivity than elsewhere. Throughout the nineteenth century Roman Personal Poetry lacked a favorable intellectual climate: merit was seen only in Horace and then as a source of moralizing quotations. It got wrapped up in the Romanticist revolution, and—because it was 'subtle, various, ornamental, clever', instead of primitive, sublime or pathetic—was less able to endure the smear of classicism. The Classic-Romantic antithesis, by the narrowing simplifications of the Classics that it provoked a hundred and fifty years ago, tended to throttle Roman Personal Poetry in the process. We find, for example, an illuminating half-truth about the nature of contemporary poetry leading Coleridge on to assert that it was Christianity that introduced subjectivity into poetry, and to declare: 'It is this subjectivity which principally and fundamentally distinguishes all the classic from all the modern poetry.'⁵ This sort of belief was most damaging to sympathetic reading of Roman Personal Poetry. But Coleridge was, after all, writing as a polemicist in the early stages of a literary revolution when no one was sure of its nature or its contours (though you might expect him to wonder how it came about that that ancient poetry which produced eighteenth-century classicism had also stimulated the poetry of the Renaissance). He was more concerned with making understood a new trend than with being fair to the old and familiar. It is more disheartening to see modern critics still accepting these over-simplifications—to see Professor C. S. Lewis, for example, applying the same pagan-Christian dichotomy in discussing mediaeval poetry, dismissing ancient poetry as a field where 'love seldom rises above the levels of a merry sensuality or domestic comfort, except to be treated as a tragic madness'⁶, listing four 'marks' of courtly love, and then describing a kind of poetry and a background to it in terms that with little change might be used of the love poetry of Propertius, and that suggest the survival intact, as near as may be, of the styles of ancient poetry.

But it is not with the Classic-Romantic controversy that I am now mainly concerned, but the assessment of seventy-five years

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ago of Greek and Roman literature, the assessment of the 1880's, which has still many of us in its grip. It seems that while, in these seventy-five years, enormous contributions have been made to classical scholarship, too little has been done to revise and improve our understanding of classical literature.

Yet a number of factors should make it impossible to go on looking at Roman poetry through the eyes of seventy-five years ago.

1. The most important is perhaps the physical gain made in these seventy-five years by the partial recovery of Hellenistic poetry, the poetry of that new Greek literature centred on Greek Egypt in the third century B.C., when Athens remained still the home of philosophy but the literary centre had become the new Greek city of Alexandria. Apart from Theocritus and Apollonius and a largish number of short epigrams, this poetry was almost wholly lost until—during the last seventy-five years—considerable fragments of it were recovered on papyrus scraps from the sands of Egypt. Callimachus has been luckiest, though, in fact, not a great deal of first-rate poetry, by him or by other poets, has been recovered. The importance of the finds is rather that they have focussed attention upon this new age in Greek literature, differing about as much from the classical age of Greek as the twentieth century differs from the nineteenth—with comparable social changes and changes in the poet's status in the community, resulting in each case in a more exclusive, more intellectual poetry. Our understanding of Roman Personal Poetry can be much improved now that we are better able to assess the nature of its dependence on this new Greek literature.⁷ We can see, for example, that the departure of Roman Personal Poetry from Public poetry's cult of the sublime, the pathetic and the witty is only the culmination of a long and conscious trend in Greek towards the 'subtle, various, ornamental, clever' which the Romans quickened into vigorous life by adding something of their own, the warmth of the poet's personality.

2. These discoveries, and the interest aroused in them by the great German scholar Wilamowitz (*Hellenistische Dichtung*, 1924) and others, at last gave classical literary history a notion of perspective and a feeling for period. The evolution of Greek literature through more than a thousand years can now be traced, Hellenistic literature filling in the gap between classical and late. Roman literature embraces, of course, a period only about half as long, but it has a pattern, too, one that is entirely different. Literature seems to have had upon the Roman mind something like the effect strong wine has upon the man who drinks little, producing bouts of brief exhilaration followed by a longish, unproductive numbness. In the first of four such bouts of intoxication (the period of Plautus and

Terence) the wine was almost purely Greek. In the second (the classical and Augustan ages) the Greek grape had grown long enough on Italian soil to acquire characteristics of its own: the bout is prolonged and successful. After another lull, two shorter bouts follow, one centred round about 60 A.D., the other round about 100 A.D. The Italian characteristics are a little strong now for the wine to be really good, and by the end of the fourth period the Roman literary genius is about exhausted.

3. I stress this notion of period and pattern to emphasize that it is no longer sensible to talk of classical literature as single and static, and uniformly different from modern literature. It serves also to foreshadow a third point: the individuality of Roman literature. Once it was realized that ancient literature was manifold in style, in impulse and in background, it became natural to try to distinguish between the Greek contribution and the Roman. To the 1880's Roman literature seemed wholly derivative. In the present century Italian scholars, not unnaturally, from Giorgio Pasquali to Augusto Rostagni, have led the way to a recognition of the differences between the more highly intellectual literature of Greece and the more coloured literature of Rome, coloured by language in form and by sentiment in content.

One would like to be able to claim that professional classics had adjusted themselves to these factors, and utilized them to effect the re-assessment they necessitate. With notable, but few, exceptions Greek and Roman literature is studied still in the intellectual climate of the 1880's. It was, admittedly, a period of such eminence of achievement that it is almost understandable if we stand still in its shadow. It is also lamentable. For these giants were extraordinarily insensitive in dealing with the sort of enquiry that the student of literature today demands. Virginia Woolf, in her study of Richard Bentley, England's classical colossus of the eighteenth century,⁸ remarks with sadness upon the poverty of literary feeling that led that great man to embark upon the task of 'detecting every slip of language in *Paradise Lost*, and all the instances of bad taste and incorrect imagery'. One senses often the same thing in a Richard Jebb, or a J. P. Postgate—an insensitivity to the whole nature of poetry that at best fascinates a little by its childish saintliness, and at worst infuriates by its stuffy arrogance. The 1880's was a time when the prestige of the classics was unquestioned and the problems of the nature of poetry not deeply sounded in England. The scholar's task was to settle the text, explain the meaning of the words, and expatiate on the historical, mythological or autobiographical allusions. Understanding and appreciation of the poetry itself did not seem to require guidance.⁹

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Roman Personal Poetry owes a lot to this age. The great commentary of Robinson Ellis on Catullus (last edition 1889); Conington's Virgil (revised edition 1881); Postgate's Selections from Propertius—44 pages of text and 376 of commentary (last edition 1884); the commentaries on Horace's lyric poetry of Maclean (1853, revised by Long 1869), Wickham (1877), Page (1895), Gow (1896). What an age! The sad thing is we need still its help. No serious commentary in English has been written this century on Catullus, Horace or Virgil. (J. W. Mackail's fine but brief *Aeneid* hardly ranks as a commentary.) There have been two short, dry commentaries on Propertius, in the nineteenth-century manner, and recently a volume of annotations, dealing brilliantly with several hundred passages, but not with the meaning of whole poems: Postgate's edition, seventy-five years old last year, still reigns in our universities. For few Roman writers will the story be different. On the Continent, though most of these poets have benefited by at least two important commentaries in French, German or Italian, there too the framework set for scholarship in the last quarter of the nineteenth century has hardly been escaped from. In the professional journals the treatment of Roman Personal Poetry has, too often, remained in England (less so in America) petrified where it was in the 1880's, laden with scholarship, missing often the whole point of a poem, behaving not seldom as though there were not one to catch.

We must not deride scholarship extravagantly: painstaking, detailed, pedestrian research is usually the inescapable prerequisite to sound opinion, but it must not be forgotten that its function is as a means to that end. In an age when the classics are studied by fewer educated people, proportionately, than at any time since the Renaissance, there exists the danger, to which Mr T. S. Eliot has drawn attention,¹⁰ of allowing the classics to be elbowed aside into accepting the status of a discipline such as Egyptology, a field for genuine scholarship, but not one of significance to the lettered public. That is the consequence if the classics persist with an outmoded tradition, continuing to shun the revivifying contact of contemporary literature. For there are two sides to the re-assessment we must make. We must take cognizance of important changes in the face of Greek and Roman literature, and we must follow, in making our re-orientation, new paths, blazed by the progress of literary criticism in our time. Failure in this second respect exposes Roman Personal Poetry to a number of pitfalls, the deepest of which it is worthwhile enumerating.

III

1. Classical literary criticism is still in the grip of a *biographical* approach. The approach through life and works was the one arrived at by the ancients themselves in their first critical fumbblings. It became 'scientific' in the nineteenth century with the 'scientific' criticism of Sainte-Beuve and Taine. Its value with a modern writer whose life is well-documented is often dubious. To attempt to build on the trivial, badly authenticated scraps that make up our lives of the Roman Personal Poets achieves little, and encourages a number of errors of method and false emphasis. The most obvious is to suppose knowledge of a poet prerequisite to an understanding of his poetry. A book of poems is better thought of as resembling pictures in a gallery. What we know of the artist, what the pictures appear to reveal about him, are subjects perhaps for curiosity, but not primarily tools of criticism, and perhaps not at all. Yet think of the fuss critics make reconstructing the *affaire* between Catullus and Clodia, even though the chronology of the Lesbia poems is unascertainable and disputed, all details—including the identification of Lesbia with Clodia—shaky, and the assumption that the score or so poems involved are the raw material of a connected story gratuitous.

This Personal Heresy in its grossest form generates a complex of subtler heresies. Poetry is confused with autobiography, or even history, as though the poet were primarily concerned with the facts about something, and trying to report them. To poetry in the first person are applied autobiography's standards of factual statement and consistency. Fantastic reconstructions of the Propertius-Cynthia *affaire* still beset us. Where autobiographical interpretation is manifestly impossible, as in the Odes of Horace (because *all* the love poems can't be 'true'), the contrary assumption is jumped to, and it is asserted that none is—that all is conventional genre-writing, imitation from the Greek and so on.¹¹ This touches off the heresy of 'Sincerity'. Catullus and Propertius are supposed to be sincere, Horace and Ovid not—and, *therefore*, inferior poets. Sincerity, like emotion in general, is an ingredient of poetry, essential to securing the temperature of fusion of the poet's material into poetry. It is not a criterion of its quality, and its relationship to factual truth is complicated.¹²

2. Next comes straight-out insensitivity to the whole question of poetic language. The great nineteenth-century classical grammarians studied Latin and Greek prose with inexhaustible energy. Of their efforts Bradley's Arnold is the palest reflection, but it reflects nevertheless their method and their object—to codify the classical

prose language. To such a code the language of Roman poetry is regarded as somehow failing to measure up.—Poetic language is talked of as though it broke the rules of prose, instead of transcending them.—The old, mechanical explanations survive, such as the infamous *metri causa*, that the rule is broken 'for the sake of the metre', to make the line scan, and not to make the line poetry.—More serious is to regard words and syntax merely as the vehicle of poetry, whose substance resides elsewhere—in the 'story', if there is one, in what is uneasily called the 'subject-matter', if there isn't. When the poetry is 'oblique', to use Dr Tillyard's term (and Roman Personal Poetry is often oblique), it is dismissed as disjointed or trivial: many elegies of Propertius have suffered this fate. Yet the last seventy-five years in contemporary literature could have taught us that words and syntax are not the vehicle, but a constituent of poetry—a notion essential to the understanding of Personal poetry, though important in Public poetry also, and one that alters our whole concept of style. The French symbolists, by their practice of verbal poetry, forced upon critics the admission of this truth. Today verbal poetry is a large, if not the exclusive constituent of much of the poetry that we read. In the classics, the first signs that we are catching up on this notion have appeared. Ernst Howald, in *Das Wesen der Lateinischen Dichtung* (1948), has stated, overstated perhaps, the case for *poésie pure* in Latin. B. A. Van Groningen, in *La poésie verbale grecque* (1953), writing especially of Hellenistic Greek, says much that the student of Roman Personal Poetry may read with profit. He will be enabled to see, for example, a unity between the apparently unconnected kinds of poetry in Catullus.—Many more things come in here: emancipation from the assumption that a distinction in meaning must always be found wherever a similar idea finds different words for its expression, and all the over-intellectualization and hair-splitting that goes with this.—A proper understanding of the function of mythology in poetry. We can discern in Roman Personal Poetry a route that English poetry has followed in this century: in Catullus, a sudden renewal of the poetic language, an abrupt return to the language of conversation improved into poetry but almost without ornament. The ornament comes with Horace and Propertius: the evocative word in Horace, the developed evocative scene in Propertius, ennobling by heroic parallel the slender theme, until at times the elaboration becomes the poetry.

3. It is easy to make this list of pit-falls long. Let me finish by handling from a different viewpoint something I mentioned earlier: the fashion of the 1880's of looking on Roman poetry as merely derivative from Greek. Great progress in the detailed knowledge

of Greek literature round that time had made possible the detection on all sides of what were called 'Greek models'. Where they could not be detected, they came to be assumed. There are a number of heresies here.—The notion, which surely only a pedant can entertain, that first-rate poetry can be a patchwork of passages lifted from other poets in another language: the business of reminiscence and allusion is more complicated than that.—The notion, often without all basis of proof, that whole poems have been lifted from the Greek—one much favoured by commentators on Horace and connected, of course, with the Insincerity-smear.—The notion, characteristic again of an over-intellectual approach, that imitation is always conscious. It is still not sufficiently realized that within the limited dimensions of ancient literature, where both poet and reader are likely to be intimate with antecedent poetry, unconscious reminiscence is likely to be a frequent stimulus of inspiration in the poet and (without the reader's realising it more than the poet) of imagine response in the reader. It is not necessary to suppose that such verbal evocations have as their object conscious evocation of a context.

IV

I have tried to speak out plainly about what seem to me three major pit-falls which we must avoid in re-assessing Roman Personal Poetry—and ancient literature more generally. It is, of course, the honest critic's constant nightmare that he may be talking about what isn't there, and it may seem rash to look for today's sophistications in poetry that is two thousand years old. I think it is a fair answer to say, firstly, that the Roman Personal Poets were in no sense primitive singers, but unusually painstaking and acute craftsmen; secondly, that their poetry, like all good poetry, achieved more than the poets perhaps fully understood, or consciously aspired to.

I may, for the sake of emphasis, have spoken as though everyone in classics were off the track and only I on it. I may have given the impression that I accept all that is new in the New Criticism. I may have encouraged the supposition that, if classical literature has a lot to learn from modern literature, it has little to offer in return. All three assumptions would be, fortunately, erroneous. The pedantry and the wrongheadedness of seventy-five years ago are still widespread, their prevalence too often stultifies still the interest of teacher and student, but they are not universal. The re-orientation began, perhaps, in Italy, with Giorgio Pasquali's *Orazio lirico* (1920). It has been continued with erudition and vigour by men like

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Augusto Rostagni and Luigi Alfonsi. In France, I may perhaps select from a shortish list the name of Mlle A. Guillemin, referring the reader to a series of discerning articles (in the *Revue des études latines* and elsewhere) in the years just before the war. In Germany, the work of Erich Reitzenstein on Propertius' treatment of emotion¹³ and the thesis of W. Abel on some formal features of Roman elegy¹⁴ are outstanding. The former attracted wide attention, the later too little. In America, Archibald W. Allen, J. P. Elder and F. O. Copley have made vigorous and acute contributions to our understanding of this department of poetry. England perhaps lags behind, though valuable work has been done by L. P. Wilkinson and W. Jackson Knight, and is being done by Mr R. G. C. Levens, —from which I understand we may soon expect the first commentary on Catullus in England this century.

What is the significance to the non-specialist of this re-assessment? The first thing to say is that Roman poetry is good poetry. The primitive and the bad do not cry out for re-examination; good poetry is too precious for us to neglect the duty of understanding it as fully as we may. It is true that the relationship of the classics to modern literature can no longer be reasonably held to be that of ancestor and descendant, or that of legator and beneficiary. They can, and should, have another kind of relevance for those who practise literature, or study it. It would be absurd to insist a modern English poet need study French or German poetry in order to learn his business. This does not mean he cannot attain a fuller understanding of poetry, and a completer accomplishment of it, if he studies the poetry of France and Germany. And what is true of the artist is even truer of the critic, who needs all he can lay his hands on that is first-rate to quicken his perceptions. Greek and Roman poetry seem to me to stand in a like relationship to our own poetry, and in that sense to be still deeply instructive. Roman Personal Poetry in particular is often close to modern poetry, the result, doubtless, of an intellectual climate in many respects similar. Not a few of our modern English poets have written in awareness of this relevance. May we be less attentive than they to the changing face of classical literature?

NOTES

¹ E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*, 1939.

² See Horace, *Satires* 1, 4, 39 ff.

³ W. H. Auden, 'The truest poetry is the most feigning', in *The Shield of Achilles*, 1955, p. 44. A most interesting poem to the student of Roman love poetry, and, despite the irony of the last section (aimed, presumably, at Claudel), an important statement on poetic language.

⁴ H. C. Baldry, *Greek Literature for the Modern Reader*, 1951 (title of Chapter V).

⁵ Quoted (with approval) by M. Colum, *From these Roots*, 1938, p. 70 f.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 1936, p. 4.

⁷ For such an assessment see *L'influence grecque sur la poésie latine de Catulle à Ovide*, Fondation Hardt, *Entretiens*, II, 1956.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, First series, 1925, p. 248.

⁹ Cf. the forceful words of F. O. Copley, *Amer. J. of Philology*, 1953, p. 149 ff.

¹⁰ T. S. Eliot, *The Classics and the Man of Letters*, presidential address to the Class. Assn of Gt. Brit., 1942.

¹¹ V. Pöschl, in *L'influence grecque* (quoted in Note 7 above), p. 93 f., very sensibly stresses the absurdity of each extreme and says interesting things about a middle course.

¹² See A. W. Allen, *Sincerity and the Roman Elegists*, *Class. Philology*, 1950, pp. 145-160.

¹³ E. Reitzenstein, *Wirklichkeitsbild u. Gefühlsentwicklung bei Properz*, 1936

¹⁴ W. Abel, *Die Anredeformen bei den römischen Elegikern*, 1930.

TOWARDS AN ONTOLOGY OF THE POEM

(From Valéry to Ponge)

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Valéry believed that Philosophy, or at least a certain philosophical attitude of inquiry, could help to solve problems of a literary nature. Our intention, in this essay, will be quite the opposite, since we are going to try to use literature to shed light on some obscure aspects of ontology and aesthetics, more particularly on the ontology of the work of art.

But the basic procedure can only be the same: to go from the better known to the less known, from the little-known to the unknown:

La vaste entreprise de la philosophie consiste après tout dans un essai de transmutation de tout ce que nous savons en ce que nous voudrions savoir, et cette opération exige d'être effectuée, ou du moins présentée, ou du moins présentable dans un certain ordre.¹

In our rapid excursion through the problems of the poem we shall try to make our ideas, if not very orderly, at least quite presentable.

Towards an Ontology of the Poem

I should like to consider here a particular case of a general problem in aesthetics, which I state thus: what type of existence does a poem have when, completely detached from its creator and not yet considered by the reader as an aesthetic object, it is a mere *thing* in suspense, between genesis and contemplation, between 'poïétique' and 'esthétique' (Valéry's own terms)?

Let me explain. Take for example Valéry's best-known poem—if not the best-known in the French language: *Le Cimetière Marin*. One day someone came and took this poem away from Valéry, who was still dissatisfied, and submitted it for publication, in the *N.R.F.* The work of creation was over. We read the poem—then thought of other things. And then we returned, we opened the book, and once more '*cette loi qui fut préparée*', as the poet puts it, again became our law: the poem created itself anew in us, and its magic, its charm, its '*je ne sais quoi*' did their work. But after all, for more than a year, it had remained a stranger to our mind. And as we, like Descartes, have a very bad memory, where then was the poem in the meantime, in what secret, rather platonic place, in what indefinable essence? Or, more simply, was it in the *book*, in the sacred slumber of the typographical characters, more precisely in that simple variation in the colour of the paper which the letters are, a merely accidental feature of the paper, the prime and substance-bearing matter?

Now, aestheticians have hitherto been mainly interested in the genesis of the work of art or in its effects, in the law of creation or in the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience, that is, either in a thing in the process of developing, or in an essentially subjective and significant thing.

For greater clarity, let us make an assumption: man, as a result of some catastrophe or other due to bacilli or radiation, disappears from this world, while the Earth and its monuments remain intact. Are we going to say that, by that some circumstance the *work of art* disappears; that the Pyramids, the Cathedrals, the British Museum or the Bibliothèque Nationale are reduced to nothingness, as soon as man has disappeared? That their existence depends absolutely on human consciousness? That seems questionable, unless you have a very advanced philosophic education in idealism or even in solipsism. And to take an even more striking example, let us imagine some flying saucer inhabited by mysterious astronauts. Like monsters, they emerge from their ship (or like angels—why not?) and come to see what is the reason for this sudden silence upon the earth. And then they discover intact huge micro-groove record libraries, and impressive Cinemascope film libraries. Like Valéry in *L'Homme et la coquille*, faced with all these varied

spectacles and these indisputable creations of *homo faber et sapiens* those astronauts will wonder: 'Who made all these things?' or will muse (perhaps without understanding them) upon the words of Ponge:

O Louvre de lecture, qui pourra être habité, après la fin de la race peut-être par d'autres hôtes, quelques singes par exemple, ou quelque oiseau, ou quelque être supérieur, comme le crustacé se substitue au mollusque dans la tiare bâtarde.²

So there is a problem. We are going to seek a path towards the difficult solution. A poem exists somewhere. We are concerned with the actual being of this poem, enclosed in this book. It is enough to make a bibliophile thrill with pleasure, for our discourse could just as easily be entitled 'Towards an aesthetic of the book', or 'An aesthetic of Typography'.

Something of Mallarmé is already beginning to loom on the horizon of our enquiry.

1. FROM THE SUBJECT TO THE OBJECT

Let us make a detour as far as possible from typography and material things: let us take ourselves inside our consciousness. The idea of consciousness is bound up with that of dissociation: *I watch myself* acting. And this idea of dissociation entails that of depth, of 'distance intérieure', which consists of stepping back for perspective, not only with regard to oneself, but with regard to the object to be attained. A depth and a perspective which are not wholly unlike Valéry's famous tank, 'sonnant dans l'âme un creux toujours futur'.³

It should be noted that this depth of consciousness and outlook can be internal *and* external. People have often pointed out (and Valéry expressed it most aptly) the depth of *external* life which Goethe had, for example, and which is so necessary for the theatre. And I believe the same could be said of Balzac and his work.

In certain great poems of philosophical intention, such as *La Maison du Berger*, *Le Voyage*, *Bateau Ivre*, *Le Cimetière Marin*, the point of view varies between inner depth and external depth, symbolised by the sea in Rimbaud and Valéry.

Changing our perspective, as it were, we find ourselves directly seeking the thing, the object, the descriptive poem, the concept-poem which strives to grasp a substance that exists. Baudelaire in his *Art Romantique* writes:

En décrivant ce qui *est*, le poète se dégrade et descend au rang de professeur; en racontant le possible il reste fidèle à sa fonction.⁴

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a formula dear to both romanticists and surrealists. In other words, for Baudelaire, just as there is '*un degré zéro de l'écriture*', as Roland Barthes puts it, so there is '*un degré zéro de poésie*', precisely at the level of teachers. I think that for once, and for the honour of our profession, Baudelaire is wrong: and Valéry's very fine poem *Au platane* will serve as a test of this point, for if any poet describes what *is*, in all its depth and density, it is Valéry. No one has rendered better than he, nor with more precise poetry, just what *is* the life of the plane tree, rooted to the soil and exposed to the winds. Here he attains to that external depth which he praised in Goethe, but in so doing he is attracted to it and immerses himself in it, like Narcissus, perilously bending over the secret of existence. Doubtless the poem is not yet transformed into an objective thing, but he strives towards this object, lovingly and with all his strength.

How does the plane tree answer the poet's loving cry? It answers with the *No* of a mute being, a *no* which evidently means (according to Alain, too) that the tree is only a tree, as has several times been said so forcibly by Francis Ponge:

'Comment s'y prendrait un arbre qui voudrait exprimer la nature des arbres? Il ferait des feuilles, et cela ne nous renseignerait pas beaucoup'.⁵

That is to say, instead of growing leaves, we put forth words, we produce articles. But we always have within us something of the limitations of the tree—and of the mollusc, Ponge would say. Leaves or words, everything is vain and transitory, —which is also expressed by Ponge in his mysterious poem entitled *Le Tronc d'arbre*:

Ainsi s'efforce un arbre encore sous l'écorce
A montrer vif ce tronc que parfera la mort⁶

Apart from some sonorities which have come from the 16th century, we find in this poem on the passage of time an expression of striving, striving by the tree, striving by man, a striving towards the liberation of words which can be seen in most poets.

We battle with words to reach the things that are more stable and more silent than we, and it must be admitted that Valéry fought valiantly to reach, as Jean-Pierre Richard puts it, '*cet être perdu dans les solitudes profondes*'.⁷

2. TOWARDS THE OBJECT-POEM

Whatever Valéry's wonderful achievements may be in the two

poems *Au platane* and *Cantique des colonnes*, Ponge goes much further than he towards merging subject and object, or, if you like, towards drawing us into the depth of the object: he wishes, as it were, to identify the poem with the object, and like certain philosophers of the past he brings concept and object so close together as to run the risk of merging them existentially.

Everyone knows Valéry's famous definition:

Un poème est une durée dendant laquelle je respire une loi qui fut préparée.⁸

A very fine definition, which clearly points out the phase of the 'poiétique' and the genesis: 'une loi qui fut préparée', and the phase of aesthetics and taste: 'une durée pendant laquelle je respire cette loi'. Unfortunately, this definition leaves no room for the poem as an object that exists on the same level as a statue or a picture. And Valéry, in his *Cours de Poétique*, insists at length upon the fact that, for him, the poem exists only 'en acte'. And not by inherent potentialities. Ponge, on the contrary, insists strongly upon the poem as an object:

Le poète ne doit jamais proposer une pensée mais un objet, c'est-à-dire que même à la pensée il doit faire prendre une pose d'objet.

Le poème est un objet de jouissance proposé à l'homme, fait et posé spécialement pour lui. Cette intention ne doit pas faillir au poète.⁹

This same thought, this same determination always to put forward an object, are expressed more vividly in his *Introduction au galet*:

O ressources infinies de l'épaisseur des choses, rendues par les ressources infinies de l'épaisseur sémantique des mots!¹⁰

This semantic density of words enables him to carve the poem from them, as it were, or to draw it as the Chinese do. By a poem, Jean-Paul Sartre explains, Ponge means

un ouvrage assez particulier et qui exclut rigoureusement le lyrisme: après les tâtonnements et les approximations qui lui ont livré les noms et les adjectifs qui conviendront à la chose, il faut les ramasser en une totalité synthétique et de telle manière que l'organisation même du Verbe en cette totalité rende exactement le surgissement de la chose dans le monde et son articulation intérieure . . . Et ce poème, précisément à cause de l'unité profonde des mots en lui, à cause de sa structure synthétique et de

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l'agglutinement de toutes ses parties, ne sera pas simple copie de la chose mais chose lui-même.¹¹

Some of Ponge's most highly-praised poems reveal and lay bare to us the dense, viscous *existence* of things as powerfully as does a Sartre in *La Nausée*. After the mineral and the vegetable in the order of mobility, we come to the mollusc in *Les Escargots*. This text dates from 1942 (*Le Parti-pris des choses*), and in it Ponge does not entirely escape the possible criticism that he is parodying Buffon (which would be all the same to him anyway, for he admires Buffon greatly, and also Montesquieu, Boileau, Malherbe or Montaigne). A more recent text is, in my opinion, far superior: an achievement which equals Valéry's *Platane*, and also a triumph of the bird's mobility over the slow viscosity of the mollusc. *Les Hirondelles* or *Dans le style des hirondelles*, a poem published by *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in September 1956, has an unforgettable opening:

Chaque hirondelle inlassablement se précipite—inafailliblement elle s'exerce—à la signature, selon son espèce, des cieux.

And a close that is no less magnificent:

Courez, volez les insectes aux cieux!

Pourchassez ces vies infimes
Terrifiez-les par vos cris!

Pourchassez ces mots infimes.
Absorbez ces minuscules,
Nettoyez l'azur des cieux!

Récriez-vous, hirondelles!
Et vous dispersant aux cieux,
Quittant enfin cette page,

Enfuyez-vous en chasse avec des cris aigus.

One can recognize in this second passage the very 'tempo' of Malherbe's great stanza. Note how close we are already to a solution: writing about swallows with the style and sweep of swallows is a fine achievement.

Ponge is not the only one to have attempted to go beyond purely imitative poetry by identifying the poem with its object. This process is already to be found in Jules Renard, at its earliest ironical stage, then in Prévert and Desnos. In psychological poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, one can see very clearly the transition from the image to identification, the first writing: '*Mon âme est un*

trois-mâts . .', and the second beginning his *Bateau Ivre* ex abrupto: '*Comme JE descendais des Fleuves impassibles*'.

But would not identifying the poem with the object described be returning rather too much to the plastic art so dear to Théophile Gautier: '*Le marbre survit à la cité*'? I do not think so, for since Mallarmé we are no longer on the purely descriptive plane in poetry, but on the plane of essences. And that is what Claudel already saw when he showed us Mallarmé setting himself before nature as if before a text to be deciphered. Ponge tries to describe animals and objects by recreating them, so to speak, but he encounters man upon his path, and would like to describe man as an animal would see him, or as a vegetable would perceive him. Here too Valéry is a fore-runner when he shows the plane tree rebelling with a 'No!', just as the too-human poet is caressing it '*comme du cheval l'ambitieuse cuisse*'. This was recently expressed by a critic:

Jean Paulhan a dit un jour, en parlant d'une nature morte de Braque, qu'on se rendait compte en la regardant ce que pouvait éprouver un citron dans son for intérieur. Cette parole exprime l'intention la plus secrète de Ponge. Les choses pour lui doivent obtenir leur forme de l'intérieur, dans le monde de leurs propres rapports, avec *leur* ciel et *leur* terre.¹²

This identifying of the poem with the object was seen even more clearly by Jean-Paul Sartre in his famous essay which appeared as early as 1943, just after Ponge's second book:

. . . la lecture du *Parti-pris des choses* apparaît souvent comme une oscillation inquiète entre l'objet et le mot, comme si l'on ne savait plus très bien si c'est le mot qui est l'objet ou l'objet qui est le mot.¹³

Ponge himself explains this in an important passage from *Proèmes: De la modification des choses par la parole*:

La parole serait donc aux choses de l'esprit leur état de rigueur, leur façon de se tenir d'aplomb hors de leur contenant.¹⁴

It could be pointed out, and indeed this has been done, in regard to such passages, that Ponge goes very far along the path to a realistic and scholastic philosophy of ideas and words, for he is as anti-bergsonian as it is possible to be. It is clear what controversies this path could lead to, so let us stay close to the literary tree, and try to go one step further towards the material object, since Ponge in his day had the honour of being called a materialistic poet.¹⁵

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3. THE MATERIAL BEING OF THE POEM

Doubtless in his letter to Gide, quoted by Valéry, Mallarmé seems to assume a modest air :

Le rythme d'une phrase au sujet d'un acte ou même d'un objet n'a de sens que s'il les imite, et figuré sur le papier . . . n'en sait rendre . . . quelque chose.¹⁶

And this simply justifies both the art of Apollinaire in *Calligrammes* and the art of Ponge in *Les Hirondelles*.

In fact, we know that Mallarmé had far more profound ideas about the sacred nature of the book, and the sanctity of the Word. He speaks of the poem—*mutatis mutandis*—as a Christian would of the Bible, the poet rivalling the saint according to the intentions of a Brémond, and that is doubtless what was rather annoying Claudel when he spoke of *la catastrophe d'Igitur*.

The object-poem of Ponge leads us away from this mallarmean road and brings us forth, by strange paths, into the problem which constitutes the ultimate aim of this essay. A poem that is very close to the object, and enters, so to speak, into its existence, also gives us a few glimmerings about the type of existence of the poem when completed, printed and enclosed in the isolation that objects have. It is Ponge who takes the plunge, although hesitantly, in a passage from *Proèmes*, written in 1919 :

O traces humaines à bout de bras, ô sons originaux, monuments de l'enfance de l'art, quasi imperceptibles modifications physiques, CARACTERES, objets mystérieux perceptibles par deux sens seulement et cependant plus réels, plus sympathiques que des signes,—je veux vous rapprocher de la substance et vous éloigner de la qualité—je veux vous faire aimer pour vous-mêmes plutôt que pour votre signification. Enfin vous élever à une condition plus noble que celle de simples désignations.¹⁷

This passage would have pleased Mallarmé, at least the Mallarmé of the *Coup de dés*.

We are now very far from the romantic poem : and the 'Pongian' poem ('poème en prose', 'proème') adheres to the object. The book, the page, are of the same class, and are 'still-lives' on the same level as Cézanne's three apples. One has only to read certain little prose poems by Ponge—for example, *l'Huître* or *Le Cageot*—and then to look at a still-life by Chardin or Braque in order to realise that the Pongian poem can lay claim to the title of still-life, from its identification with the object described to its crystallisation in the silence of the typographical characters.

Why? Because—and Sartre has several times insisted on this, following Ponge—because the secretion of the mollusc Man is words, just as the words of the vegetable are leaves and flowers (that is, words in volume and colour, whereas human words are wind and sound):

Ponge tient la parole pour une véritable coquille qui nous enveloppe et protège notre nudité, une coquille que nous avons secrétée à la mesure de nos corps si mous. Le tissu des mots est pour lui une existence réelle, perceptible: il voit les mots autour de lui, autour de nous.¹⁸

Let us press Ponge's conclusions a little and we will make the following observations:

1. Ponge himself likes to see Literature developing in space and not in time:

Je me représente plutôt les poètes dans un lieu qu'à travers le temps. Je ne considère pas que Malherbe, Boileau ou Mallarmé me précèdent, avec leur leçon. Mais plutôt je leur reconnais à l'intérieur de moi une place.¹⁹

And Ponge does not stop at this inner place, he imagines a city which would have been the joy of Voltaire when he wrote *Le Temple du Goût*. Listen to what he says:

Brusquement, avec Malherbe, on roule sur le pavé royal, on entre dans la cour d'honneur de la littérature française.

Qui ne sent cela? . . . Oui, le pavé royal, la cour d'honneur. L'on pourra ensuite pénétrer dans plusieurs galeries, salons . . . puis l'on ressortira, définitivement, semble-t-il, par une seconde grande cour, fort magnifique, mais cour de derrière, avec Montesquieu.²⁰

One can easily see what wonderful use can be made of this passage by the historians of literature, with Montaigne Avenue leading to the château, and, beyond the Montesquieu courtyard, Hugo circus and various Proust, Gide and Valéry avenues, streets and lanes.

But it is above all this aspect of an 'appeal to space' that interests us, space more concrete than time, an anti-proustian view. The work of art is constructed in space.

2. The work of art is preserved in space, for words can be set down on a record or on the tape of a tape-recorder. They sleep there, they exist there in sleep, until the kiss of a Prince Charming comes and wakes them, as François Mauriac said somewhere.

3. As for the words that are not just canned, as Georges Duhamel

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puts it, but printed by a phonetic transcription, resulting in typographical characters, these form the vast secretion of libraries; they swell the shelves, loaded with books as far as the eye can see, like a kind of crystallised tissue formed by a living thought. Or again the publication is like the snail-slime of man; the author is like a snail that is proud of its slime. Here we must again quote Jean-Paul Sartre:

Il me semble retrouver chez Ponge un désir commun à beaucoup d'écrivains et de peintres de sa génération: que leur création fut une *chose* précisément dans et uniquement dans la mesure où elle était leur création.²¹

Paul Valéry had already noted this possible attitude on the part of the artist in a passage from *l'Homme et la Coquille*:

Peut-être ce que nous appelons la *perfection* dans l'art (et que tous ne recherchent pas, et que plus d'un dédaigne), n'est-elle que le sentiment de désirer ou de trouver, dans une œuvre humaine, cette certitude dans l'exécution, cette nécessité d'origine intérieure, et cette liaison indissoluble et réciproque de la figure avec la matière que le moindre coquillage me fait voir?²²

Besides, these thing-words, which appear strange to us in this 20th century, and the secretion-words which seem even stranger, were familiar to Rabelais who saw words taking solid form. Finally, a whole new theology of the *Logos* would have to be brought in here.

It is time to put an end to these excursions into a forest of problems, and collect our results in one small basket.

Conclusion

We must first answer the question asked at the beginning of this essay: what type of existence does the poem have once it is published, set quite apart outside of its creator, without any possibility of rewriting? All the evidence tends towards the poem's having a latent life; let us not call it larval, but rather subterranean and hidden, exactly like those very fine drawings in the prehistoric caves recently discovered, drawings which have survived in darkness for centuries. What appeared obvious in relation to the drawing and the statue should be examined in relation to the poem.

And we are indeed dealing with a real being, made concrete upon real paper by the typographical characters. One can attribute to this real being, 'en surimpression', an intentional being, tending towards significance. Nevertheless, there still remains at its basis

a forest of hieroglyphics intended as such, an arabesque traced out as such by the creator of the sonnet or the poem in stanzas. This point, however, would require a full philosophical treatment which would go beyond the bounds of this essay.

Let us therefore admit a certain failure at the end of this investigation, in which there is still far too much left to be said! But this very failure justifies us in the eyes of Francis Ponge, who defines his poem as beginning from the point of failure. These works, too deeply merged in the substance of things, run the risk of too soon becoming orphans, alone, dissociated. The risk is run by every still-life. Ponge has frankly analysed this failure in a note to Camus: *Réflexions en lisant l'Essai sur l'Absurde*:

Historiquement voici ce qui s'est passé dans mon esprit:

1. J'ai reconnu l'impossibilité de m'exprimer.
2. Je me suis rabattu sur la tentative de description des choses (mais aussitôt j'ai voulu les transcender!)
3. J'ai reconnu (récemment) l'impossibilité non seulement d'exprimer mais de décrire les choses.

Ma démarche en est à ce point. Je puis donc décider de me taire, mais cela ne me convient pas: l'on ne se résout pas à l'abrutissement.

Soit décider de publier des descriptions ou relations *d'échecs de description* . . . Sous une forme plaisante, autant que possible. D'ailleurs l'échec n'est jamais absolu.²³

I could not find a better justification, nor a better explanation of the audacity which prompted me to write these pages.

NOTES

¹ Paul Valéry, *Léonard et les Philosophes. Variété III*, N.R.F. 1936-53, p. 139.

² Francis Ponge. *Le Parti-pris des Choses* N.R.F., 1942. Notes pour un coquillage.

³ *Le cimetière marin*, Strophe VIII.

⁴ *L'Art Romantique*, Ed. Conard, p. 314.

⁵ F. Ponge. *Proèmes*, N.R.F., 1948, p. 201.

⁶ id. p. 212.

⁷ J-P. Richard. *Poésie et Profondeur*, Ed. du Seuil, 1955, p. 10

⁸ P. Valéry. *L'amateur de poèmes*.

⁹ F. Ponge. *Proèmes*, N.R.F., 1948, p. 54.

¹⁰ id. p. 139.

¹¹ J-P. Sartre. *Situations I*, N.R.F., 1947, p. 265.

¹² *Nouvelle N.R.F.*, 1er sept. 1956. *Hommage à Francis Ponge*, p. 423.

The Moral Conflict in Georg Büchner's 'Dantons Tod'

¹³ *Situations I*, p. 245.

¹⁴ *Proèmes*, p. 37.

¹⁵ cf. J. Rousselot. *Panorama critique des nouveaux poètes français*, Seghers, 1953.

¹⁶ Paul Valéry. *Variété II*, p. 183.

¹⁷ *Proèmes*, p. 37.

¹⁸ J-P. Sartre. *Situations I*, pp. 247-48.

¹⁹ *Proèmes*, p. 83.

²⁰ N.N.R.F. 1er sept., 1956, p. 435.

²¹ *Situations I*, pp. 252-253.

²² Paul Valéry. *Variété V*, pp. 34-35.

²³ *Proèmes*, pp. 146-147

THE MORAL CONFLICT IN
GEORG BÜCHNER'S *DANTONS TOD*

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When Georg Büchner wrote *Dantons Tod* in February 1835 he was 21 years of age—a fact which many commentators mention, marvel at and promptly forget. And yet it is important in assessing certain aspects of the play; for not only the rebelliousness and exuberance but also the extremism of youth has left its mark, an extremism which makes it a moral duty to be frank and 'realistic', and prefers martyrdom to compromise. Büchner's aversion to compromise reveals itself in an intolerance of convention, whether political, religious, moral or social, and is a marked characteristic of all the extant writings, from the schoolboy essays to the political pamphlet *Der Hessische Landbote*, the letters and the drama. This attitude is reinforced by Büchner's extraordinary ability to drive straight to the heart of a problem and by his impatience with those less clear-sighted than himself.

In politics he was unashamedly radical, in religion atheistic, but his rejection of the moral taboos of polite middle-class society was confined to the literary sphere. Realising the effect that *Dantons Tod* would have on a respectable reading public Büchner, in his letters to his family and fiancée about the play, adopted an attitude curiously compounded of apology and defiance. In the two well known letters to his parents of the 5th May and 28th July 1835 he

defended himself against the charge of immorality. A historical drama, he says, must be true to period—'neither more moral nor more immoral than history itself; but history was not created by *der liebe Herrgott* as reading for young ladies, and so I cannot be blamed if my drama is no better suited to that purpose'. Furthermore, he continues, the obscene language used in the play was merely a pale reflection of that which had been customary at the time of Danton. This self-justification extends over several letters, and the feeling with which one is left is that he is over-eager to plead his case.

Why did Büchner choose his theme of Danton and the 'bandits' of the revolution? He put this question himself but although his answer at the time was unsatisfactory the reason becomes clear in other passages of the letters where the ruling classes are mentioned. Büchner has two hates, the canting hypocrite and the despot, but he is most vehement when the two are combined in the one person.

Ich muss lachen, wie fromm und moralisch unsere Regierungen werden. Der König von Bayern lässt unsittliche Bücher verbieten! da darf er seine Biographie nicht erscheinen lassen, denn die wäre das Schmutzigste, was je geschrieben worden! Der Grossherzog von Baden erster Ritter vom doppelten Mop-sorden, macht sich zum Ritter vom heiligen Geist und lässt Gutzkow arretieren, und der liebe deutsche Michel glaubt, es geschähe alles aus Religion und Christentum und klatscht in die Hände.¹

At the time when he wrote the play Büchner was smarting from his brush with the authorities and living in daily fear of arrest. Moreover, after the failure of his political pamphlet *Der Hessische Landbote* he realised the futility of trying to alter the course of history by opposing the government single-handed. Thus *Dantons Tod* provided an outlet for his pent-up emotions. No-one could fail to see how much of himself he has put into his hero and Danton's attack on the 'blutige Tugend' of the tyrant Robespierre carries a note of intense personal feeling. Youthful bravado alone, and even a genuine desire for local colour do not account wholly for the infinite care and detail with which the clash between virtue and vice is depicted. It is an integral part of the fabric of the play and contributes an emotional atmosphere which heightens the drama of the political situation.

The basic conflict of the play lies between Danton and Robespierre and all that they stand for. I do not wish to dwell on the merely political aspects of their antagonism which are as readily accessible to us as they were to Büchner in the historical records of

the time. It is the human and personal implications which provide the true dramatic interest.

The central character, Danton, is presented with much care and subtlety. He is a man to whom success has come easily, and who has the capacity for inspiring love and admiration seemingly without effort. This personal magnetism is felt not only in his own intimate circle, but also by the ordinary people—when he cares to exert himself he can, by a jest or a touch of familiarity, arouse the sympathies of the mob. Yet this very facility leads him to a belief in his own indispensability and a blind over-confidence which, combined with the almost total atrophy of the power of decisive action, proves fatal. Danton is bound by an intense *taedium vitae* whose roots are both emotional and intellectual. A sharp revulsion against the rule of the guillotine is accompanied by deep reflection on the ultimate meaning and purpose of the revolution and indeed of life itself. This leads him to a clear realisation of the futility of existence as a whole and of individual endeavour in particular in a world where the individual is crushed beneath the 'fearful fatalism of history' and becomes a plaything of forces beyond his control.

Thus Danton lapses into a state of passivity which is a flight from the intrusive reality of events he cannot master, and from the inexorable logic of his own thoughts. He takes refuge in a form of egotism which consists of enjoying each moment as it comes, and refusing to pass moral judgments on himself or others. Love of luxury, fastidiousness, superficial cynicism and amorality are anything but proletarian vices—indeed they savour too much of the habits of the nobility under the *ancien régime*. Revolted by hypocrisy Danton goes to the opposite extreme and positively flaunts his way of life before the eyes of the public, thus delivering a weapon, ready-made, to the Jacobins.

The greatest possible contrast to all this is Robespierre, the fanatical puritan, single-minded, harsh and cold; a skilful demagogue who knows how, by careful calculation, to touch off the fury of the mob. To all outward appearances utterly sincere, he is nevertheless open to the suspicion of using his revolutionary idealism as a cloak for personal ambition and as an excuse for removing the one great obstacle in his path. For he is acutely conscious of the fact that, despite his undoubted power, he does not possess the prestige of his rival. But Robespierre is not entirely inhuman. After the interview with Danton in the first act in which Danton questions the validity of his morals and the purity of his motives, the mask of hypocrisy slips for a moment. In a brief monologue he comes

close to acknowledging that his famous 'morality' is a hollow sham:

Keine Tugend! Die Tugend ein Absatz meiner Schuhe! Bei meinen Begriffen! — Wie das immer wiederkommt. — Warum kann ich den Gedanken nicht loswerden? Er deutet mit blutigem Finger immer da, da hin! Ich mag so viel Lappen darum wickeln, als ich will, das Blut schlägt immer durch.— . . . Ich weiss nicht, was in mir das andere belügt. (I, vi)

But in the end he suppresses his doubts, for ambition demands singleness of purpose. Self-righteousness is his strongest weapon, and the surest way to deceive the credulous is to deceive oneself.

In Robespierre we see the beginnings of doubts such as have taken possession of Danton, but whereas Danton, by the morbid clarity of his thought, has set himself apart from his followers and from politics, Robespierre, persuaded by his desire for power, allows himself to move with the latest swing of the revolutionary pendulum. Danton is the rational thinker, Robespierre merely rationalises.

The clash between the two leaders is symptomatic of a more fundamental antagonism—two ways of life confront each other, the one liberal, tolerant and amoral, the other rigid, narrow and totalitarian. The essential difference is summed up in the persons of St Just and Camille Desmoulins, who are drawn in unrelieved black and white. Like Danton, Camille has turned his back on the guillotine, but his policy of mercy springs from his idealism and love of humanity, so that these qualities, together with his innocence and youth, make him a foil to his leader. Such idealism is no more likely to survive than Danton's passivity. Indeed, in Büchner's world the romantic hero is a sure victim.

St Just is the destined executioner. Cold-bloodedly he forces Robespierre, who has a considerable affection for Camille as a former school fellow, to condemn the young man to death, just as a puritan father makes a child destroy the toy it loves most. He is a tactician and a formalist—it is politically expedient that Danton and his party be destroyed but it must be a strictly judicial murder. St Just also employs the doctrine of determinism, not as it is found in Büchner's own letters, as a probe into the meaning of history, but as a sophistical argument to further his immediate ends.

Men such as these produce an atmosphere of corruption in which the informer and the sadist flourish. Sadism is a recurring theme; we see it for example in the treatment which Barère and Collot² mete out to political prisoners, but it becomes most prominent wherever the guillotine casts its shadow. In fact the female sadists,

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the 'Guillotinen-Betschwestern', who gather round and gloat as the heads roll into the basket, are symbolic of the Jacobins. They represent the lower order of devotees in a cult whose high priests are Robespierre and St Just.

The counterpart to the Betschwester is the prostitute, who is identified with Danton's party. There is greater significance than is immediately apparent in Danton's facetious remark:

Uebrigens, auf was sich stützen? Unsere Huren könnten es noch mit den Guillotinen-Betschwestern aufnehmen . . . (II, i)

In all these matters Büchner is not passing a moral judgment, he is not concerned with what is conventionally regarded as good or bad. But there is no doubt that free thinking and promiscuity are more sympathetic to him than an unholy mixture of rigid morality and masked cruelty.

It is widely accepted that Büchner anticipated the naturalists in many ways, and this is particularly apparent in his treatment of prostitution as a mere product of environment. 'Was tat sie? Nichts! Ihr Hunger hurt und bettelt.' (I, ii) However the theme as a whole has much more than naturalist significance. In the play these women are symbols of a life of warmth and freedom which is doomed to destruction. Their symbolic importance is indicated not only by the number of scenes which are devoted to them, but also by the constant recurrence of the prostitution theme in the metaphor and simile of the dialogue. One of the most important scenes in this respect is that in Marion's chamber. The very fact that the scene, although powerfully written, is dramatically redundant, points to the fascination which the subject held for the author. Marion is naively surprised that any-one should take exception to the life of the prostitute. Prostitution is simply a part of her nature, she can imagine nothing else; for her it is more than a mere living—

Die anderen Leute haben Sonn—und Werktage, sie arbeiten sechs Tage und beten am siebenten, sie sind jedes Jahr auf ihren Geburtstag einmal gerührt und denken jedes Jahr auf Neujahr einmal nach. Ich begreife nichts davon: ich kenne keinen Absatz, keine Veränderung. (I, v)

Her life is pleasure and dedication together: 'wer am meisten genießt, betet am meisten'.

Marion's philosophy recurs time and again at the political level—in Camille, for example, castigating those who would 'cast a nun's veil over the naked shoulders of that most charming of sinners, France'. (I, i) Robespierre says of Danton that 'he wishes to halt the steeds of the revolution at the brothel' (I, vi); the Dantonistes

calmly accept the charge of libertinism, and in semi-serious fashion even suggest that government cannot be sound without it:

Danton: Ich lasse alles in einer schrecklichen Verwirrung. Keiner versteht das Regieren. Es könnte vielleicht noch gehn, wenn ich Robespierre meine Huren und Couthon meine Waden hinterliesse.

Lacroix: Wir hätten die Freiheit zur Hure gemacht!

Danton: Was wäre es auch? Die Freiheit und eine Hure sind die kosmopolitischsten Dinge unter der Sonne. Sie wird sich jetzt anständig im Ehebett des Advokaten von Arras prostituieren.
(IV, v)

Sensual enjoyment as a philosophy of life gives us a new insight into Danton's character. By his pose of world-weary cynicism Danton has convinced himself that he would welcome death, even in the shape of the guillotine; but it becomes clear that his desire for death is intellectual and almost aesthetic. This game with death—for it really is a game—provides a sort of mental titillation, a mild flirtation: 'Ich kokettiere mit dem Tod; es ist ganz angenehm, so aus der Ferne mit dem Lorgnon mit ihm zu liebäugeln.' (II, iv) Actually he appears to feel that life must go on for ever, that death cannot come, and this conviction lies at the root of his constant repetition: 'Sie werden's nicht wagen'. Even before his arrest he shows a love of life which is something more positive than a mere instinct for self-preservation. In the second scene of Act II he watches a street-girl flirting gaily with a soldier; the sun is shining and he feels an upsurge of passionate delight in life. The whole world seems to be full of laughter and enjoyment. Later, when death is no longer a mirage in the distance but an immediate reality, he greets it with revulsion, realising that the state of physical existence has its own delights. The words of defiance which he uses to hearten his comrade take a typical form. To entertain himself during his last hours he chooses Voltaire's *La Pucelle*.

Ich will mich aus dem Leben nicht wie aus dem Betstuhl, sondern wie aus dem Bett einer Barmherzigen Schwester wegschleichen. Es ist eine Hure; es treibt mit der ganzen Welt Unzucht.'
(IV, iii)

In these last scenes Danton is resigned to his fate, but it is not the sham resignation which characterised his earlier behaviour. Now he understands the attraction of life and the repulsion of death, but he goes to the guillotine with calm and dignity.

If the world of *Dantons Tod* is divided into two opposing camps there is nevertheless one all-important group which cannot auto-

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matically be linked with either—the people. Büchner's own interpretation of the political role of the proletariat is well known and need not be considered in any detail here. It is sufficient to recall the famous letter in which he says that the two great levers required to set the people in motion are 'material misery' and 'religious fanaticism'.³ The party which makes use of these forces will win the struggle for power.

Dantons Tod is practically a text-book example of this maxim. For all his socialistic tendencies Büchner never idealises the proletariat in the play; although the crowd scenes are portrayed with understanding and even a trace of sympathy, their stupidity and fickleness are pitilessly analysed. Hunger, fear and misery are the breeding ground of hatred and lust for blood, and provide the perfect raw material for the demagogue. Left to themselves the people would dissipate their resentment in unco-ordinated acts of violence, such as the attempted hanging of the young man whose only offence was the possession of a pocket handkerchief. (I, ii) However, Robespierre is a master of totalitarian technique, and knows how to channel this resentment; he knows that it is necessary to concentrate on one scapegoat alone, and that the chosen victim must be painted in the blackest colours, since the emotions aroused must be strong enough to obscure any fine distinctions. The mob greets with enthusiasm any outlet for their pent-up desire for revenge, but their enthusiasm grows when revenge is presented to them in the guise of a crusade, a crusade against weakness, against compromise, against vice. A semi-religious fervour is aroused by vague emotional terms such as 'Justice', the 'Glorious Revolution', and 'Virtue'. This corresponds exactly with a remark from one of the letters: 'Es ist der gewöhnlichste Kunstgriff, den grossen Haufen auf seine Seite zu bekommen, wenn man mit recht vollen Backen "Unmoralisch!" schreit'.⁴

Danton has played into Robespierre's hands by disregarding the nature of the ordinary people. Through his love of luxury and his aristocratic airs he has alienated them to a dangerous extent, for the crowd distrusts anyone who sets himself apart and refuses even to pay to morality the tribute of hypocrisy. He knows, but does not care, that the mob hates those who are privileged to enjoy themselves, that the common man is virtuous only because circumstances make a necessity of virtue:

Lacroix: Und ausserdem, Danton, sind wir lasterhaft, wie Robespierre sagt, d.h. wir geniessen; und das Volk ist tugendhaft, d.h. es geniesst nicht, weil ihm die Arbeit die Genussorgane stumpf macht, es besäuft sich nicht weil es kein Geld hat, und

es geht nicht ins Bordell, weil es nach Käs und Hering aus dem Hals stinkt und die Mädels davor einen Ekel haben.

Danton: Es hasst die Geniessenden wie ein Eunuch die Männer (I, v)

By contrast Robespierre makes a virtue of necessity when he addresses the crowd as 'armes tugendhaftes Volk'. The attitude of Robespierre to the mob—a compound of flattery and intimidation—is taken by Büchner directly from the historical accounts available to him at the time. The actual phrase, 'armes, tugendhaftes Volk', comes from one of his sources, *Die Geschichte unserer Zeit*⁵, and the famous speech beginning: 'Die Waffe der Republik ist der Schrecken, die Kraft der Republik ist die Tugend' (I,iii) in all three principal sources in one form or another.

On the whole Büchner remained faithful to the historical records which he used. To this extent he could claim with some justice that he made history 'neither more moral nor more immoral' than it was. Nevertheless a comparison between the play and the sources does reveal a significant change of emphasis to suit the author's intentions. In his *Histoire de la Révolution Française* Thiers, while quoting St Just's obviously biased estimate of Danton's character, 'cupide, débauché, paresseux, corrupteur des mœurs publiques',⁶ uses much milder terms than even Büchner himself: 'Il recherchait même les jouissances les plus innocentes, celles que procurent les champs, une épouse adorée et des amis'.⁷ It is true that Thiers appears to be particularly well disposed towards Danton, but in none of the sources is the latter quite such a libertine as Büchner makes him. Of two accounts of the interview between Danton and Robespierre, Mignet (*Histoire de la Révolution Française*⁸) does not mention virtue and vice at all, and *Die Geschichte unserer Zeit* describes a long sermon by Robespierre on the subject of virtue which leaves Danton crushed and speechless. In the play Danton takes the offensive, denies the very existence of morality, and makes a forceful speech in favour of epicureanism. The same approach is reflected in the purely textual changes. For instance, the account of Robespierre's speech to the Jacobin Club in *Die Geschichte unserer Zeit* contains the words: 'Menschen, welche sonst auf Dachstuben lebten, bewohnen jetzt Paläste, fahren jetzt in Karossen und zehren an dem Marke des Volkes . . .', which Büchner expands to: 'wenn ihr an Leute denkt, welche sonst in Dachstuben lebten und jetzt in Karossen fahren und mit ehemaligen Marquisinnen und Baronessen Unzucht treiben.' (I, iii)

The conscious determination to underline Danton's connection with the world of harlots and pleasure-seekers is even more notice-

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able in the emendation of the manuscripts. Of 40 alterations (involving the *meaning* of the text) cited by Thieberger, no less than 27 are relevant to this point. Typical is the constant insertion of 'Hure' and 'Huren', and the inclusion of 'gegen die Lustseuche' in the sentence: 'Sie werden noch aus der Guillotine ein Spezifikum . . . machen.' (III, vi)

Thus, when he claims that his characters are as history and nature made them, and scoffs at those people who try to make him responsible for their morality or immorality, he is technically correct, but is obscuring the main issue. It seems evident that he was attracted to his subject, not solely for its historical interest, but also because certain personal problems relating to his own experience were involved. Büchner had reason to hate the puritanical despot, whether hereditary prince or revolutionary dictator, and his reaction was to assert that both mind and body should be completely untrammelled—freedom at any cost, even if it carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

NOTES

¹ Letter to his family. 1st January, 1836.

² Barère and Collot also represent most strongly the element of hypocrisy. e.g., Act III, Sc. vi.

³ Letter to Karl Gutzkow from Strasbourg, not dated. Probably 1836.

⁴ Letter to his family. 1st January 1836.

⁵ *Die Geschichte unserer Zeit*, bearbeitet von Karl Strahlheim, ehemaligen Offizier der kaiserlich französischen Armee, Stuttgart 1828, as cited by R. Thieberger in his critical edition of *Dantons Tod, La Mort de Danton*, Paris 1953. I should like to acknowledge the work of Thieberger in collating most of the passages from the main sources which have influenced the actual wording of the text.

⁶ Thiers: *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, Paris, 1825 and 1834. Quotations from the edition: Paris, 1854. Vol. 5. p. 386.

⁷ *op. cit.* Vol. 5. p. 404.

⁸ Mignet: *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, II (Paris, 1825, Leipzig, 1827). Edition used for this article: Paris, 1914, Vol. 2. p. 59.

ANDRÉ CHAMSON

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Few writers earn spectacular laurels. The recent election of André Chamson to the Académie Française has brought modest fulfilment to a modest career: never a 'popular' success like Giraudoux or Anouilh, nor a prominent controversialist like Bernanos or Sartre, Chamson, over the thirty years of his career as a writer, has written soberly and battled quietly in an area that has widened from his native province to the broad perspectives of social and national conflict. Equipped with a high sense of public obligation, and of the writer's professional integrity, he has won a well-merited respect as a novelist, a journalist and a soldier. Self-committed to the struggle for social justice in the depression years, and no less firm in his resistance activity (which involved concealment of the Louvre treasures from the Occupation authorities), he has proved a sturdy fighter for human rights and human values. As co-founder of the left wing weekly *Vendredi*, as president of the P.E.N. Club, as Conservateur of the Petit Palais, as an army officer in 1939 and 1944-45, he has not spared himself. What is specially attractive, and characteristic, is that he has remained, throughout, imbued with the spirit and tradition of his native Cevennes, and has been their interpreter to his day and generation.

It is perhaps rather a pity that the Cevennes, the 'spinal column' of Languedoc and a really rugged tract of country, should be associated in English minds with the holiday exploits of that whimsical Scot, Robert Louis Stevenson. It is true that as a fellow-Calvinist he was well equipped theologically to appreciate a race of peasants rooted and grounded in Biblical disciplines, and that the Cevennes were sufficiently akin to his native Pentlands to make him feel at home there—true, too, that his prose-poetry clothes with its pleasant lyricism a landscape relatively unknown to Anglo-Saxon readers. Yet it is all *ab extra*: his knowledge of the local mountaineer and of his way of life is about as profound as his understanding of the mentality of his donkey Modestine (which resented, in any case, his *a posteriori* approach). His description of the Cheylard district as 'one of the most beggarly countries in the world . . . like the worst of the Scottish Highlands, only worse' or of the folk of Cassagnas as 'intelligent after a countrified fashion' is enough to show the complete externality of his reactions.

'Ces Cévennes' observed Michelet, 'sont si pauvres et si rudes; il n'est pas étonnant qu'au point de contact avec la riche contrée de la plaine, il y ait un choc plein de violence et de rage envieuse.'

The Languedoc plain itself, for all its rich cities, is both sun-scorched and wind-swept, and has been for centuries a highway of conquest for the invader, whether Carthaginian or Roman, Goth or Saracen. To Michelet, something of the hot, heavy African wind had passed into this coastal reach to produce its tradition of cruelty and violence, of fanaticism and conflict, and to sear into its history the stigma of the Albigensian Crusade. Yet the plainsman is a lamb compared with the mountaineer, hardened to resistance by inhospitable nature, and to toughness by a terrain deeply eroded into ravines and chasms. Here perch the villages, in little pockets of habitable land, but overhung by huge masses of rock, while in the higher Cevennes human habitation falls away, and sheep and goats browse on pastures strewn with rock, and overlooked by Mt Aigoual or the Lozère chain. To this peasant race history eventually brought a dogged Protestant faith nourished by Biblical revelation and its visions, a patriarchal, prophetic type of faith which resisted 'unto blood' when, late in the seventeenth century, Louis XIV was so ill-advised as to attempt to dragoon into Catholic uniformity these *Camisards*, as they were styled. What happened there was substantially what had already happened to the Scottish Covenanters: flesh and blood might be conquered, but not the spirit of the revolt. And the martyrology of these cruel days, kept in remembrance by many a local 'Old Mortality', long outlived the monarchy that provoked this persecution: in fact, it still forms the background of the faith held in these parts. A granite faith born of a granite soil, and one which, like the psalmist, lifted up its eyes unto the hills.

André Chamson, born at Nîmes in 1900, was well equipped by birth and circumstance to become the chronicler-novelist of the Cevennes region. Brought up as a boy at Alès and Le Vigan, under the great ridges that rose to north and west, he inherited from Calvinist and even Methodist ancestors a tradition of revolt and non-conformity, and of intimate knowledge of Holy Writ, which gave him most precious insights into the dominant mentality of his native province, and was in part the inspiration of his *Suite cévenole* when it came to be written. The haunting fear of death that came to him from the Italian maid, Anna, the austere, rather sombre faith of his grandmother Aldebert, who knew her Bible by heart and her God as a personal friend, the frugal, straitened living made inevitable by his father's speculations and by a country poor in resources, the weekly prayer-meeting in the home—all these things nurtured the boy in a way of life that combined intense piety with strict personal integrity. He learnt, too, from the old soldier Finiels and from his classmates at Le Vigan, the picturesque local dialect

of the mountain country sprung from ancient Latin, and imagined himself, in his 'teen-age battles with rivals from other schools, as a true scion of the *Camisards*, as a blood-brother of Cavalier and 'Esprit' Séguier and the heroes of those times.¹ It was a heritage that remained with him, even after he had made his farewell to his childhood's faith and his native heath, and it is stamped indelibly on the novels which constitute probably the most enduring part of his published work, the three regional novels of what he later called his *Suite cévenole*.

It is true that there is one other book, a most moving story, told in a peasant setting near Meyrueis, *L'auberge de l'abîme*—a tale of the Hundred Days and of its sequel. As a prelude to this book Chamson placed a significant quotation from Nietzsche: "Celui que je préfère est aujourd'hui le meilleur, c'est le paysan bien portant; il est grossier, rusé, opiniâtre et endurant: c'est aujourd'hui l'espèce la plus noble." Yet the story, though powerfully told, is not really a 'close-up' of peasant life, which is in any case only on its fringe, and subordinate to the commanding personality of the village doctor. The peasant is seen chiefly in terms of conscription-avoidance and hatred of the gendarme, of stolid conservatism and rapacity in a time of disorder and upheaval. And here, as so often in Chamson's work, the *thèse* (if there *is* one) weakens real character-study, and the interest resides in action rather than motive. The landscape, however, is sympathetically interpreted by one familiar with it—even the subterranean landscape where much of the action takes place.

The *Suite cévenole* is only loosely linked together, like Giono's *Trilogie de Pan*: there are no interlocking characters nor sequence in time (the first novel being set in the 1914 war, the second in the Second Empire and the third unlocalized in time). The unity lies in the interpretation of Chamson's *pays*, in the rendering of landscape, in the close observation of the Cévenol peasant, and most of all in the evocation of the essential spirit of this mountain region, of its vigorous independence, its Biblical intuitions and its sober respect for, even admiration of, moral integrity and moral leadership. As Chamson observes (p. 1), this is an area that prefers, to local legend and folklore (not a rich resource here), reminiscences of the age of persecution and stories from Biblical antiquity informed with those ethical insights which the peasants so treasure. Rather dour and dogmatic, traditionally respectful of old age and of its patriarchal authority, nourished on prayers and sermons and the Scriptures, with none of the gay exuberance of the southerner, this race of highlanders finds in André Chamson a really gifted interpreter. Their link with their native soil and with humanity at

large is older and tougher than nationalism; it has dignity and depth and equilibrium.

Roux le bandit, as the author admits (*Préface de 1946*), is a book of his generous, idealistic youth, the story of a Cévenol woodsman-farmer forced in 1914 by compelling religious scruples to become a conscientious objector and a refugee. It means ostracism for his mother and sisters, and for him the unsparing condemnation of his kind. His lot is hard: from fear of arrest he has to live as an outlaw on the mountain tops, where the winter is brutally severe—sleeping in the sun by day and keeping moving in the snow all night so as not to die of cold. Fires and known hospices are impossible: for four years he must live like a beast, dubious even of the occasional shelter of a mountain cave, and running every risk of being apprehended if he has recourse to his own folk for provisions. Quite literally, he has not where to lay his head—his moral and physical solitude is complete. He lives with his Bible and his conscience, rejected of men. The passions of war, especially among the non-combatants, pass judgment upon him, and every man's hand is against him. It is only slowly that public opinion veers in his favour, led by men back on leave from the Front,—only slowly that the conviction grows, upon men predisposed to such convictions, that Roux is a 'man of God', guided, not by fear, but by his own inward truth, a law in his members which cannot accept the arbitrament of violence. This is a province that respects moral intransigence: 'thou shalt not kill' is for him the Word of God, an absolute prohibition. That, added to the peasant's instinctive antipathy to the gendarme, is quite adequate to enlist sympathies in his favour, and in the last year of the war he is able, with the ready connivance of his fellow-Cévenols, to move about more freely, to lend a hand with harvesting or vintaging or the storing of wood for the winter. His final arrest and imprisonment assume the proportions of a community disaster, so deeply rooted is the general conviction of his utter rectitude.

This central figure, indeed, is not strongly delineated: he is sparing of speech and hardly more than a presence, though not a disembodied one—and characterization, we have seen, is not Chamson's strong point. Yet as a symbol and focus of the innate spiritual non-conformity of the Cévennes mountaineer, he could hardly be bettered. This rebel province is in his blood, its mountain lore is instinctive to him, its seasonal activities are part of him, its tradition of deep, personal faith is incarnate in him. He knows, in fact, no other *pays*. The incidental glimpses of local life are convincing, too—the superstitious belief in fabulous beasts that haunt the mountains, the evolution of the womenfolk from adolescent auda-

city to discreet maturity and authoritarian old age, the economy of the summer mountain pastures, the dialogue form of much of the story all combine to give authentic local relish to a crisp and well-told narrative.

The second novel of the trilogy, and the longest, *Les hommes de la route*, again set in the Mt Aigoual country, and in the middle of last century, is the story of the building of a new mountain road and its impact on the life of two mountaineers, Combes and Audibert. Combes is a happy child of nature, not in the least fretful about the things of the morrow, rejoicing in his work, a great lover of freedom and open spaces, sober and eminently sane. His *fidus Achates* is Audibert, who shares his robust optimism and calm, and his joy in living. The setting here is that of a country town, and the thesis is the slow draining away of rural manpower into urban industry—which seems somehow to standardize the situation, and to rob the book of some of its local colour. Combes, too, an ex-Protestant and free-thinker, is less positive, less definite a character than Roux, and Audibert and he, though they keep their balance and serenity, lose somewhat of their *raison d'être* as mountaineer Cévenols when they become odd-job-men in and about Saint-André. Audibert, indeed, turns his back on his father's upland domain, flees the loneliness of it and comes to cherish the company and modest comforts of working-class suburbia. Their respective wives are of the Martha type, much given to fretting and to minor social snobberies, and contemptuous of rural simplicities; getting and spending, they lay waste their powers, and forget to live. Combes is the only one who has a natural immunity to the contagions of urban living: he sits lightly to possessions, to a livelihood, to a fixed domicile even—he remains a man of the land, never happy except when at work, a yeoman and a lover of life.—But the regional value seems ancillary to a social allegory, and though the incidentals of the story show sympathetic observation of local usage, it could hardly be maintained that the Cévennes are a major element in the story.

The third novel, *Le crime des justes*, is a return to the Roux le bandit vein of inspiration, and here once more the Cévennes region emerges as the home of a centuries-old tradition of scrupulous moral integrity. Here again the stresses are ethical and not religious: the Arnal family are neither of the Protestant nor of the Catholic persuasion, but their name is a by-word for sagacity and truthfulness. The chief of their clan is nicknamed Counsellor: with his minute knowledge of the law, his habit of wielding authority and his unquestioned probity, he is a sort of legal consultant and justiciar to a whole commune. His authority is

patriarchal but unpretentious, closely linked to everyday necessities: it extends to the members of his numerous clan as well as to the town and village folk who seek his advice. They live apart from other men, in a huge farm at the head of a valley, and their numbers render unnecessary any recourse to the labour market. Their code of honour and duty is a strict one, resting on a merciless scrutiny of their conscience: they are not devoid of pride, but this does not vitiate their sense of stewardship. The disaster that befalls them, an unfortunate passion between a brother and his mute sister, deals a mortal blow to their family tradition: they conceal the disgrace, at the price of an infanticide, unpremeditated but not involuntary.

Their own moral code takes its revenge on them. Their knowledge of the blot on the family honour robs their testimony of its authority and purity, and the obligation to dissemble makes their instinctive taste for isolation more pronounced. A morose taciturnity, a sort of listlessness, lays hold of the chief of their clan and spreads to all of its members. The younger members break free—an unheard-of gesture in their family history—and seek their fortune elsewhere. The elders still give counsel and dispense justice, but their outward authority conceals an inward unfaith: they no longer believe in themselves, nor in the purity of their witness. And when disclosure at last comes, it is a release: Counsellor takes upon himself the whole burden of the family's guilt, and justice, though unwillingly, lays upon him the iniquity of them all.

There is an undeniable strength in this story. The Maubert farm, the home of the Arnal clan, seems to be invested with a life of its own: as a citadel that may not be approached during the long months when it is snow-bound, as a bountiful supplier of the fruits of the earth at harvest time, as a capacious home for numerous families, it seems to house a chosen people, who dominate the neighbouring village for its good, but with no thought of private advantage—it is a spontaneous tribute that is offered them, moreover, a staunch faith in something that is old, and tried, and local. The passing of the seasons is viewed with a farmer's eyes, and the treatment shows an intimate knowledge of farm life and farm procedures. Very well done, too, is the series of glimpses of village life, from the mayor downwards—the municipal elections, the feud between Simon and Pantel, the drunken frenzy of Combaroux, and all the company of the old, the poor and the merely litigious who come to consult Counsellor, are all vividly drawn, with no touch of satire, by a man who belongs to these parts, and for whom, in this story, no outside world appears to exist at all. Landscape counts for less in this book than in many a regional novel, because

here scenic detail is sacrificed to human (which seems appropriate in a race that draws so much of its strength from ethical and Biblical values).

There is one other work, the *Histoires de Tabusse*, (1930), that merits notice in this discussion, though it is more slight, and couched rather in the form of whimsical folk legend. It occupies somewhat the same place in Chamson's work as *Colas Breugnon* in that of Romain Rolland, or *Cantegril* in that of Raymond Escholier. As its author says, in his preface to the 1948 edition, it was for him only 'un divertissement d'été, une fête villageoise', and represents a mosaic of local legends and of recollections of his boyhood 'dans ce massif de l'Aigoual qui est ma montagne sacrée, parce qu'il est le cœur de mon pays'. (p. 9). Tabusse is a woodsman, a hearty drinker and a braggart, and his years in the army have made him a vigorous equalitarian. He loves a fight, and heartily despises all city folk, whether male or female. He has a heart of gold and a choleric exterior which refuses thanks or compliments. In love he is about as subtle and diplomatic as a rhinoceros. In short, he is a local legend, a Till Eulenspiegel—yet not so strongly localized that he could not equally hail from Savoy or Burgundy or the Pyrenees. His *faits et gestes* are not in the least epic, nor do they constitute a novel, regional or otherwise.

The regionalist may legitimately regret that Chamson elected to turn aside from this source of inspiration to be the chronicler of contemporary social and political issues. Books like *La galère* and *Le puits des miracles* can scarcely last longer than Barrès's *Leurs figures* or Anatole France's *L'île des pingouins*. Yet one hesitates to cast the stone at a writer, a democrat and a patriot who accepted the challenge of the nineteen-thirties, of the Sixth of February and of the Spanish Civil War, of Nazism and Fascism. Hemingway and Malraux and many like them also chose to resist. Indeed, the very word 'resist' has special undertones for Chamson; in his collection of essays published in 1948, *Si la Parole a quelque pouvoir*, he glories in the 'resistance' tradition of his fellow Cévenols, in a will-to-fight which was not merely economic nor sectarian, but drew from men and women, even children, in imprisonment and martyrdom, the same witness to unconquerable human values, the same conviction of justification and of ultimate triumph. Among the folk of this mountain race the word 'defeat' had no currency, and Chamson too was prepared to wrestle against principalities and powers. He did this with full knowledge of what he was doing, conscious that his 'œuvres de révolte et de combat' (p. 74) had not been matured in the silence and deliberation required for more permanent literature

André Chamson

His post-war work has shown a more reflective note, greater breadth and wisdom, and—important for him as a novelist—closer observation of people. One book, *La neige et la fleur* (1951), is a wonderful interpretation of the post-war younger generation, written most sympathetically and understandingly by an older man who speaks its idiom and thinks its thoughts. Another book of youth, the autobiographical *Chiffre de nos jours* (1954), shows a mature Chamson not unwilling to return to the Cevennes, and to the scenes of his childhood, for stimulus and sustenance. It is a book vigorously, even truculently local: it hides no blemishes, nor the poverty and melancholy of his family life, yet it is a loyal and affectionate evocation of the Cevennes folk and their country, and shows the author, in his formative years, mistrustful of the outside world and clinging closely, as one belonging there, to the ruggedness and violence of his native province. If this testimony—fifty-four is an early age to write one's autobiography—represents a genuine homecoming to Chamson's first source of inspiration, some most interesting work may yet be in store. At all events, his earlier works, with their simplicity and strength, and the intense personal commitment of the author to the traditions and destiny of his beloved Cevennes, show, with a characteristic austerity of style and thought, a vigorous attempt to discover norms for human activity in the peasant way of life. He tried, like Jean Giono, to discover in the rural French tradition of his boyhood a source of sanity and moral health for the disenchanted, psychoanalytic generation of the nineteen-twenties. He succeeded—up to a point. He made a worth-while contribution to the regional novel. What doubts one may entertain as to the durability of this work stem rather from his quality as a novelist and creator of characters than from the regional source of his inspiration. It is a source to which he, or a disciple, may yet return.

¹ v. *Le chiffre de nos jours*, Gallimard, 1954.

VOLTAIRE AND MAFFEI

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The mind of Voltaire was such that whatever would enter therein must espouse its form, become no more than water in a vessel. The merit of this was, of course, freshness even in imitation; the defect, his failure to understand any of those foreign poets who furnished him with the impulse to write. Students of comparative literature are no doubt already familiar with his dismissal of Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, but may not know quite so well his abrupt execution of Ariosto, to whom he owed much of *La Pucelle*:

Ce que vous appelez mon Arioste est une folie qui n'est pas si longue que la sienne. *Non ho pigliato tante coglionerie*. Je serais honteux d'avoir employé trente chants à ces fadaises et à ces débauches d'imagination. (Lettre à M. l'abbé d'Olivet: 24 août 1735).

With these antecedents, we might expect that Scipione Maffei, whose tragedy of *Merope* (1713) was the obvious and acknowledged source of Voltaire's *Mérope* (1743), would receive treatment as cavalier. But, on the contrary, Voltaire remained polite about the matter, though he grew ever more patronising. He liked the Italian play on first reading it and wrote the author a mannerly letter:

Vous êtes le premier qui avez eu le courage et le talent de donner une tragédie sans galanterie, une tragédie digne des beaux jours d'Athènes, dans laquelle l'amour d'une mère fait toute l'intrigue et où le plus tendre intérêt naît de la vertu la plus pure.

Having given up a half-hearted intention to translate, Voltaire imitated various scenes, discovered defects which he obligingly revealed to Maffei, and finally began to write a piece of his own, as we note from his letter to M. Thiriot of the 6th December 1737:

Je n'ai encore fait que deux actes de *Mérope*, car j'ai un cabinet de physique qui me tient au cœur.

From this time till the first performance, his letters reveal that Voltaire's attitude towards his forerunner swayed between two extremes—that of declaring quite bluntly that he was only seizing on his own property wherever he chanced to find it, and that of admitting, rather shamefacedly, that perhaps, after all, he might owe somewhat. A few weeks after writing to M. Thiriot, Voltaire was ready to claim that:

Ce n'est pas la *Merope* de Maffei, c'est la mienne. (Lettre à M. de Formont: 23 décembre 1737).

Voltaire and Maffei

And in a letter to d'Argental, dated the 14th July 1738, he said :

. . . puisque j'ai pris tant de liberté avec le marquis Maffei, dans les quatre premiers actes, je pourrai bien encore changer son cinquième. En ce cas, la *Mérope* m'appartiendra tout entière.

Later still in the same year he thought the process of leaching out poetry and replacing it with wit had gone far enough for him to point with pride to 'une *Mérope* de ma façon, une tragédie française . . .' (Lettre à M. l'abbé d'Olivet : 20 octobre 1738). Of course, it did not stop there : constant remodelling went on till the manuscript was sent to the printers, and even as late as the 1st June 1740, Voltaire told d'Argental : 'J'en ai fait trois nouveaux actes'.

What then is the result of these seven years of hard, though intermittent work, and is it, on the whole, worth the effort?

The French play has a nervous compactness which is lacking in its original. It seems much shorter, yet this is largely an illusion : the total number of scenes has been reduced only by one (30 as against 31), and the verses by almost six hundred, not a great margin, after all. So the result must have been obtained by some means not so apparent as merely writing less. The characters look much the same in identity and function, if one lists them in pairs, thus : Merope-Mérope, Egisto-Egisthe, Polifonte-Polyphonte, Polidoro-Narbas, Euriso-Euryclès, Adrasto-Erox, Ismene-Isménie. But Maffei made use of two others who are mentioned and do not appear—Arbante, a messenger sent secretly every six months into Laconia to bring news of Egisto, and an unnamed slave of *Merope*, who spied on his mistress for Polifonte. One may agree that these are no loss, but Voltaire's reduction of Polidoro into Narbes, a conventional 'père noble', is another matter. Polidoro in Maffei's play has real stature; he is a Polonius without ridicule, and all that he says is wise and tender, all that he does natural and essential to the plot. But current notions in France of what constituted dramatic economy led to his part being reduced. In a letter to M. Thiriot, dated the 10th April 1738, Voltaire seeks to justify this radical change :

. . . trois personnages principaux, et voila tout. La plus extrême simplicité est ce que j'aime; si elle dégénère en platitude, vous en avertirez votre ami.

Apparently M. Thiriot was lacking in candour, and did not warn his friend that a four-wheeled carriage is not improved by making one of its wheels so small that it only touches the ground at intervals. He might also have mentioned that the danger of 'platitude' was increased by attempts to render the characters of Merope and

Polifonte more tolerable to a polite century. In the Italian play, the tyrant of Messenia loves Merope with an evil but sincere passion: in Voltaire's version Polyphonte is only ambitious and admits it to Erox ('J'ai besoin d'un hymen utile à ma grandeur'). Later, when Maffei's villain orders Merope to be dragged to the temple or slain if she resists ('... e s'ancor contrasta, un ferro in seno vibrare al fine . . .'), we hear the genuine accents of humanity, unknown to Voltaire's Polyphonte. Merope, too, is seen by Maffei as a mature woman ('oltre al settimo lustro . . .'), while Voltaire does not think of her as being over thirty-five, definitely middle-aged by the standards of his time, if we are to give their normal meaning to the words he uses to describe her charms ('... vos appas, encor dans leur printemps.'). All the savagery of Medea is in the Italian heroine's threat to pluck out the eyes of him she takes for her son's murderer ('... tuo scempio/dal trarti gli occhi io già incomincio'), while Voltaire's Mérope is as civilised as himself.

It is not, however, in the devitalizing of character that Voltaire's improvements are most distressing, but in his plot changes, which do indeed make things seem to run more swiftly, but only at the cost of taking away from that suspense and that uncertainty which bind the emotions of an audience to every turn of the dramatic fiction. For example, Narbas reveals to Mérope that the young stranger is her son in Act III, sc. IV of Voltaire's play: it is not until the very last scene of Act IV that the Italian heroine receives this news, after she has made two determined efforts to kill him. Voltaire's reasons, as set out in a letter to Père Porée, 15th January 1739, are quite unconvincing:

Toute scène doit être un combat . . . il n'y a que l'usage du monde et du théâtre qui puisse rendre sensible cette vérité. Le marquis Maffei en est si pénétré, qu'il a poussé l'art jusqu'à ne jamais produire sur la scène la mère avec le fils que quand elle le veut tuer, ou pour le reconnaître à la dernière scène du cinquième acte; et je l'aurais imité, si je n'avais trouvé la ressource de faire reconnaître le fils par la mère en présence du tyran même, ressource qui ne serait qu'un défaut si elle ne produisait un nouveau danger.

The device he uses seems, however, to be just such a defect, since far from producing a new danger, it merely gives Polyphonte an opportunity to parade a pseudo-Cornelian magnanimity, as in Act V, sc. II.

More fundamental even is the question of the point at which Mérope learns of the slaying of her husband Cresphonte and of two of her children by the usurper Polyphonte, fifteen years before

Voltaire and Maffei

the action of the play begins. In Maffei's version, Merope already knows of his crime when he comes to ask her hand in the very first scene, and makes no attempt to conceal the horror aroused in her by his murderous insolence ('E ch'io da un mostro tale udir mi debba/parlar di nozze e ricercar d'amore?'). Voltaire obviously felt the situation to be intolerable, and held back a revelation till Act III, sc. V, thus demonstrating that he and his century had lost sight of the truth that tragedy is no more than the portrayal on the stage of intolerable situations.

The extent to which, as a poet, he lacked essential hardness is revealed in a letter to M. de Cideville, in which he speaks of his work as being a 'tragédie sans amour, et qui peut-être n'en est que plus tendre'. The same desire for elegance, though less a tender elegance here than a rich one, has led to various minor changes such as the second assassin at the bridge, the introduction of the tomb of Cresphonte, the body of the tyrant borne bleeding on to the stage with thunder and lightning, and above all the substitution of a suit of armour for the ring Egisto wore as the token of his birth. Seldom is the apostle of reason so unreasonable as in imagining that one brought up as a shepherd boy could go wandering about Greece in a king's armour, while the ring is not only more probable in itself but is a handier dramatic property, first kept by Adrasto under the pretext of shielding the young stranger, then passed to Euriso, who shows it to Merope. One is tempted to conjecture that 'cette armure sacrée' with its convenient blood-stains is none other than the mail of Rinaldo from the *Gerusalemme Liberata* of Torquato Tasso (Canto VIII, st. XLVIII), all the more since we know from his correspondence that Voltaire was reading Tasso at this time (cf. Lettre à M. Thiriot: 13 novembre 1738).

There are but few cases in which direct verbal reminiscence may be traced, so the conclusions to be drawn cannot include any reproach of plagiarism.

VOLTAIRE

ACT II, sc. II

Euryclès: Eh! madame, d'où vient que vous versez des larmes?

Mérope: Te le dirai-je? hélas tandis qu'il m'a parlé, Sa voix m'attendrissait, tout mon cœur s'est troublé. Cresphonte, ô ciel . . . j'ai cru . . . que j'en rougis de honte! Oui, j'ai cru démêler quelques traits de Cresphonte.

ACT III, sc. IV

Mérope: Barbare! il te reste une

MAFFEI

ACT I, sc. III

Ismene: Che hai, regina? Oimè quali improvvisi lagrime ti vegg'io sgorgar dagli occhi?

Merope: O Ismene, nell'aprir la bocca ai detti / fece costui col labbro un cotal atto./ che'l mio consorte ritornommi a mente./ e me'l ritrasse sí com'io 'l vedessi.

ACT III, sc. IV

Merope: Barbaro, madre / fui ben

mère! Je serais mère encor sans
toi, sans ta fureur. Tu m'as ravi
mon fils.

ACT V, SC. I

Egisthe: Je suis le sang d'Hercule,
et je suis dans les fers!

ACT V, SC. VII

Méropé: Reconnaissez mon fils
aux coups qu'il a portés . . . Eh!
quel autre jamais qu'un descendant
d'Alcide . . . Nourri dans la misère,
à peine en son printemps, Eût pu
venger Messène et punir les tyrans?

anch'io e sol per tua cagione / or
nol son più . . .

ACT V, SC. I

Egisto: In queste vene adunque
scorre il sangue d'Alcide.

ACT V, SC. VII

Méropé: Questo colpo lo prova:
in fresca etate/ non s'atterran
tiranni in mezzo a un tempio / da
chi discende altronde e nelle vene/
non ha il sangue d'Alcide . . .

Voltaire sincerely felt that he had rescued a good thing from undeserved obscurity and by giving it a new dress had made it acceptable to the society of his time. And indeed the success of *Méropé* was equal to that of *Zaïre*. He had managed to accomplish what he had set out to do, which was, essentially, to make the play presentable. Warned by the reception *Adélaïde du Guesclin* received in 1734, he realised that it was not enough to remain at the head of his century, that it was necessary for him to look frequently over his shoulder to make sure that the others were following. With *Méropé* they would have felt no difficulty. The unities are observed, whereas Maffei appears to make use of four days.¹ There is no mingling of comic and tragic, nor is the tone of any passage in Voltaire's version akin to the humorous and rueful comments of Polidoro on old age, which lend a distinctly Shakespearian flavour to this character. Save for certain stage-directions everything is as it was in the tragedies of Racine.

In sum, he took a play not unworthy of its Greek origin and made of it but another of those 'longues conversations en cinq actes' at which he himself had mocked so wittily. Without subscribing to the determinist position that Voltaire is no more than the resultant of the social forces at work in the Eighteenth Century, one might well admit that in this instance the intellectual climate did make it impossible for him to do otherwise. Such a sociable being as he was could not ignore the advice of friends and correspondents like M. de Formont and M. l'abbé Moussinot, and their constant antipathy to excess. In the result, he has produced a prudent piece of work that was well liked at the time, but which nowadays seems sadly inferior to its model.

¹ *Méropé*, Act II, sc. II: 'Già due giorni, al ponte/ che le due strade unisce, un uom fu ucciso'

THE THEMES OF THE NOVELS AND PLAYS OF ALBERT CAMUS

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Albert Camus is one of the most discussed writers of our time. Many of his critics have concerned themselves almost exclusively with the thought content of his works, a preoccupation deprecated, it would seem, by Mr S. John in a recent article in *French Studies*.¹ Current criticism *does* in fact neglect the undoubted literary merits of this author, but one cannot agree with Mr John when he affirms in another article that Camus' 'chief claim upon our interest is surely his power as an imaginative writer'.²

It is significant that most of his characters are thesis types, and that Camus himself describes a literary work as 'l'aboutissement d'une philosophie souvent inexprimée, son illustration et son couronnement'. M. de Luppé recognizes the didactic purpose of his work when he says: 'Camus voulait que l'œuvre d'art nous mette en face de notre réalité nue'.³

The writing of Camus has inevitably been affected by the tragic crisis through which mankind has recently passed. With others of his generation, notably Sartre and Malraux, he has felt it imperative to diagnose the ills that beset us and, in so doing, to question the beliefs of orthodox religion and ethics. Much of his great vitality as a writer springs from his criticism of the values of twentieth-century society.

Fundamental in his approach to human problems is the conviction that man can hope for no life beyond the present; and that death, therefore, overshadows all men's lives. This obsession with death might partly be accounted for by the uncertainty of life under Nazi terrorism, and the experiences of the War. One is reminded of the charge made against our times in *L'Homme révolté*,⁴ and of Malraux's affirmation: 'La mort est là, voyez-vous, comme l'irréfutable preuve de l'absurdité de la vie'.⁵ This consciousness of the limitations of human existence is the subject of a comment by M. Albérès: 'Pour aucun de nos grands écrivains actuels (he writes) il ne s'agit d'autre chose que de connaître les murs entre lesquels nous enferme notre condition, d'accepter dans ce champ clos la seule lutte possible et de l'assumer entièrement'.⁶

In considering the themes of the novels and plays of Camus, I am reminded of a passage from Baudelaire's essay on Banville, in which he commends a certain critic's method of discerning a writer's motivation in thought. He says: 'Je lis dans un critique :

"Pour deviner l'âme d'un poète, ou du moins sa principale préoccupation, cherchons dans ses œuvres quel est le mot ou quels sont les mots qui s'y représentent avec le plus de fréquence. Le mot traduira l'obsession".⁷ This principle may effectively be applied to Camus.

Of prime importance are the terms 'absurde' and 'clairvoyance'. With the latter he associates 'ténacité' in the following significant statement:

La ténacité et la clairvoyance sont des spectateurs privilégiés pour ce jeu inhumain où l'absurde, l'espoir et la mort échangent leurs répliques.⁸

In his early work, Camus makes frequent use of the term 'absurd', but as his thought evolves, he alternates 'absurd' with 'revolt', the two words running through *Caligula* like question and answer in a tragic dialogue. These words provide clues to the line of thought pursued by Camus throughout his novels, essays and plays. The essays, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) and *L'Homme révolté* (1951), deal with the concepts of absurdity, lucidity and revolt and so, to some extent, provide a metaphysical explanation of the imaginative works.

The first novel, *L'Etranger* (1942), would perhaps puzzle a reader unacquainted with the characteristic philosophy of Camus; and Sartre has seen fit to write an 'explanation' of this work.⁹ Unprepared by such exegesis, the reader may find its atmosphere strange, its 'hero', Meursault, enigmatical. Meursault is an example of man living in the 'absurd' state which is, in brief, the situation created by the disparity between man's needs and aspirations and the conditions of his existence. To Camus, atheistic, obsessed by the significance of death, and poignantly aware of what he calls the 'divorce' between man and the universe, human beings appear, at this stage of his thought, to be the victims of futility. He uses the word 'absurd' to describe this despairing state which, since it is the nature of man to be of the world, is one with the human condition. Camus feels that the majority of men live like Meursault, unaware, or only partially aware, of this fundamental 'absurdity' of life

Lever, tramway, quatre heures de bureau ou d'usine, repas, tramway, quatre heures de travail, repas, sommeil et lundi mardi mercredi jeudi vendredi et samedi sur le même rythme, cette route se suit aisément la plupart du temps. Un jour seulement, le 'pourquoi' s'élève et tout commence dans cette lassitude teintée d'étonnement.¹⁰

The last part of this quotation refers to the realization of absurdity

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or 'le moment de conscience' which may even occur fortuitously, 'presque au coin d'une rue'.

But, even for the reader familiar with the ideas of 'absurdity' briefly touched on above, Meursault remains ambiguous. Superficially, he appears a man whose responses to the ordinary happenings of daily life are completely automatic, but looking beneath the surface, one perceives that he is conscious of the futility of the lives round about him and even appraises ironically 'le caractère insensé de cette agitation quotidienne'. So impossible does it seem for him to understand the motives of his fellows that they appear like puppets, or characters in a silent film.¹¹ Thus by this awareness, Meursault is not living wholly in the 'absurd' state, but according to Camus' definition of absurdity, must be regarded to some extent as an 'absurd' man. This gives point to M. Sartre's statement: 'Il aura son illumination à la dernière page, mais il vivait depuis toujours selon les normes de M. Camus'.¹²

So far we have considered Meursault as a thesis type of character explainable in metaphysical terms, but it must also be realized that he is partly a product of the environment in which the author himself grew up. Camus' early works show to what extent the easy-going life of the Algerian littoral, with its fatalistic outlook, contributed to the creation of his first fictional character. A passage from *Noces* (1938) proves that some of the basic philosophy of the author is drawn from these African experiences and is thus quite independent of the theme of absurdity:

Les hommes trouvent ici pendant toute leur jeunesse une vie à la mesure de leur beauté. Et puis après, c'est la descente et l'oubli. Ils ont misé sur la chair mais ils savaient qu'ils devaient perdre Ce peuple tout entier jeté dans son présent vit sans mythes, sans consolation . . .¹³

Returning to the view that Meursault is intended to illustrate the theme of 'absurdity', we note the relation of two experiences which impress on him the deep gulf between his motiveless attitude of unbelief and the conventional morality of the community. First, during the trial following his killing of an Arab, seemingly on a mere impulse, he is struck by the fact that the case made against him by the prosecution is absurdly remote from his own feeling about the 'crime'. A bewildering variety of moral and social judgments have been brought to bear on an act which was to him almost automatic.

The second shock to his sense of values is felt when, under sentence of death, he is visited by the prison chaplain, who exhorts him to repent and offers the consolation of Christian salvation.

Shaken out of his indifference, Meursault angrily confronts the chaplain and shouts a violent denunciation of the latter's way of life. This is 'le moment of conscience'. Meursault stoically resolves to accept his human condition in all its finiteness, and refuses therefore to be the 'dupe' of blind hope, and of faith in a supernatural power.

Reference has already been made to *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Not only does this work afford an explanation of the 'absurd' state, but towards the end of it Camus finds the symbol which illuminates his concept—Sisyphus, who having incurred the wrath of the Gods, was doomed to perpetual punishment, attached to his rock in an ever-futile effort to roll it back up from the depths of the valley to which it constantly fell from the summit. But Camus does not see in the toiling Sisyphus what Odysseus saw. He sees, because that is what he chooses to see, a man imprisoned in the 'absurd' state, but triumphing over it by lucid awareness and proud scorn. And the myth is boldly transformed to make Sisyphus 'embrace his destiny' as Camus considers it incumbent on twentieth-century man to do. There is a proud, stoical dignity in:

Toute la joie silencieuse de Sisyphe est là. Son destin lui appartient. Son rocher est sa chose. De même, l'homme absurde, quand il contemple son tourment, fait taire toutes les idoles . . . L'homme absurde dit oui, et son effort n'aura plus de cesse. S'il y a un destin personnel, il n'y a point de destinée supérieure ou du moins il n'en est qu'une dont il juge qu'elle est fatale et méprisable. Pour le reste, il se sait maître de ses jours.¹⁴

Only after the 'moment de conscience', just before his death, does Meursault understand and accept his fate as Sisyphus did. Only then does he know a difficult kind of liberty, and with it, peace:

Et moi aussi, je me suis senti prêt à tout revivre. Comme si cette grande colère m'avait purgé du mal, vidé d'espoir, devant cette nuit chargée de signes et d'étoiles, je m'ouvrais pour la première fois à la tendre indifférence du monde. De l'éprouver si pareil à moi, si fraternel enfin, j'ai senti que j'avais été heureux, et que je l'étais encore.¹⁵

Here then is a *roman à thèse* par excellence, and because of the exaggeration of the thesis, *L'Etranger* is less like a novel than a Voltairian 'conte philosophique'. It lacks human quality, the interest of milieu, in fact the very stuff of life. The setting is subordinated to the development of an idea, so we find in this novel none of the rich texture of a story like *Regain* or *Le Sagouin*. Meursault is unreal because he is an experimental character created

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with the intention of showing man in the 'absurd' state, just as Zola made his characters the vindication of his belief in the evil effects of environment and heredity.

The question now arises: 'What is the individual to do when he finds himself, like Meursault, in the cul-de-sac of absurdity?' Suicide is not the answer.¹⁶ What then? He can live the 'tramway-bureau' existence, as Meursault does before his awakening; or, alternatively, he can revolt. At the end of the novel, in the scene with the chaplain, Camus introduces the theme of 'revolt' which is to become a dominant motif of his subsequent works.

This word 'revolt' does not adequately describe the state of mind of his 'absurd' characters. Rather, there occurs in them a moment of revolt during which they are aware of 'absurdity'. Then follows lucid acceptance of their condition, together with the resolve either to make this condition 'leur chose' as did Sisyphus, or to follow the logic of 'absurdity' to its ultimate conclusion.

In that they show characters pursuing the latter course, the two plays *Le Malentendu* and *Caligula* form an important link between *L'Etranger* and the second novel *La Peste*. Meursault and Caligula are human beings aware of 'absurdity' and prepared to follow its implication through a series of acts of an utterly destructive nature.

After Drusilla's death the young Caligula disappears, and his friends and counsellors assume that grief has caused him to become demented. When he returns, however, he reveals that it is not his sister's death, but the discovery of a certain truth, that accounts for the great change in him. He says to Hélicon: 'Ce monde, tel qu'il est fait, n'est pas supportable . . . Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux'.¹⁷ This is the moment of lucidity. Gradually, Caesar's associates, his mistress Caesonia and his friend Scipio, learn what conclusions he will draw from his discovery of the absurdity of a condition which condemns human beings to unhappiness and death. His Intendant, taken aback by Caesar's strange manner, inadvertently suggests that the Treasury requires his attention. 'Soit!' says Caligula, and taking this hypothesis as his starting point (because in the 'absurd' state all facts and events are without significance), he proceeds to order the extortion of property from patricians in order to fill the Treasury. His inhuman logic gradually becomes apparent to his horrified associates. If life is absurd, he reasons, why not awaken men from the illusion of thinking that one thing matters more than another?¹⁸

Caligula is mad, but he is, in the Camusian sense, a lucid madman. The moment of revolt has been followed by the decision to pursue 'absurdity' to its logical end, be it murder, annihilation, or sacrilege. The culmination of this course of action is the scene in

which he apes the Gods, appearing on the stage grotesquely clad as Venus, and forcing the patricians to make obeisance to him. Eventually, the moderates assassinate their mad Emperor; they in their turn revolt, as it were, in the name of humanity. Cherea says: 'J'ai le goût et le besoin de la sécurité. La plupart des hommes sont comme moi. Ils sont incapables de vivre dans un univers où la pensée la plus bizarre peut en une seconde entrer dans la réalité'.¹⁹

There is a curious parallel between the sentiments of Caligula and those of the mother in *Le Malentendu*. She had the same logical attitude, as is apparent from her statement about killing her own son, the prodigal Jan, of whose identity she is vaguely aware:

Je sais bien que cela n'a pas tellement d'importance et que lui ou un autre, aujourd'hui ou plus tard, ce soir ou demain, il fallait bien que cela finisse.²⁰

But whilst Caligula's absolute power as an emperor allowed him to translate his awareness into action,²¹ the mother's lucidity was passive and limited to a half-hearted complicity in the crimes of her terrible daughter. Nevertheless, she accepted the logic of the situation to the extent of finally murdering her own son.

It would seem that in *Caligula* the young Emperor symbolizes the destructive power of individual rebellion if it is not informed with love and humanity. In this play a decisive point is reached in Camus' thought, a point where he appears to stop and put the question, 'Revolt . . . but how and for what reasons?' At this moment, history played its part in giving a definite answer to the question, for the experiences of the Occupation and the sharing of a common cause forced Camus to re-state his concepts of absurdity and revolt in a philosophy 'faite à la mesure de l'homme'. The turning-point in his thinking is recorded in *Lettres à un ami allemand*, important because they clearly show his 'prise de position' at this time. Whilst confirming his atheistic attitude, the vicissitudes of the Occupation kindle in him the beginnings of a religion of humanity to be formulated fully at a later date in *L'Homme révolté*. In the last of these letters, he reveals the direction his thought is taking:

Je sais que le ciel qui fut indifférent à vos atroces victoires le sera encore à votre juste défaite. Aujourd'hui encore je n'attends rien de lui. Mais nous aurons du moins contribué à sauver la créature de la solitude où vous vouliez la mettre. Pour avoir dédaigné cette fidélité à l'homme c'est vous qui, par milliers, allez mourir solitaires.

The idea of 'fidélité à l'homme' is developed with fine artistry in

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La Peste (1947), acclaimed by many critics as one of the great novels of the century. It is interesting to observe that in this work a further stage is reached in the evolution of Camus' thought. The 'plague' is quite probably the scourge of the Occupation,²² and the inhabitants of the stricken city of Oran symbolize a human community thrown suddenly into a major calamity, the appalling possibilities of which they refuse at first to recognize.

In the first part of the novel, Camus describes the setting for the impending tragedy, and then, dramatically, he unfolds the story of the plague. The details of its progress are at first recorded by Dr Rieux in his diary, and then Tarrou, a visitor to Oran, takes up the narrative.

After some indecision, Tarrou resolves to help Rieux minister to the stricken victims, and side by side they fight to mitigate their suffering. They do so, not because of a sense of duty, but because, as Rieux says: 'Il y a sur cette terre des fléaux et des victimes et qu'il faut, autant qu'il est possible, refuser d'être avec le fléau.' They both exemplify the lucidity and tenacity which Camus holds to be the ideal attitudes for contemporary man to adopt; and in the dialogue which makes clear their reason for action, the words 'clairvoyance' and 'honnêteté' assume an almost liturgical value.²³ To Rieux and Tarrou, and those who elect to help their fellow-men, an effort of solidarity seems the only effective way of fighting plague, and they do not deceive themselves into thinking they are behaving in a selfless and heroic way.²⁴

There are also the enemies of the doomed community, the worst being the Judge, 'ennemi No. 1', who maintains inflexibly that the common law should be applied to this state of emergency, and the black marketeers like Raoul who feed like vultures on human disasters. Cottard typifies the indifference of those who stay at home and turn their backs on the tragedy of others.

La Peste, then, is the diary of a human experience in which a community of men and women are tested to the limits of endurance. Tarrou dies of the plague, and before Rieux has time to recover from this blow, he learns that his wife has died in a sanatorium. After the crisis has passed, life goes on as usual and people are dancing in the streets. What has Rieux, the man who has lived at the very centre of the disaster, learned from the ordeal?

He has learned to know men, and has found that in spite of all their failings, 'il y a dans les hommes plus à admirer qu'à mépriser'. Human beings are the victims of a condition which they do not choose; a condition which implies a wide gulf between their aspirations and the limitations of their mortality. In its symbolic sense,

the 'plague' is really life itself. 'Qu'est-ce que c'est que la peste?' asks Rieux. 'C'est la vie, et voilà tout.'

To those without the comfort of belief in a supernatural world, or to those who cannot accept the palliative of forgetfulness through the pursuit of activities, the only worth-while attitudes are clear-sightedness and a stoical acceptance of fate, so clearly illustrated by the manner in which Tarrou dies.²⁵

Obviously, this conclusion arrived at by Rieux, the narrator, is really that of the author himself. He is the witness, and the events are the Second World War and the Occupation. According to Camus' definition,²⁶ Rieux and Tarrou, by reason of their lucid acceptance of fate, are clearly 'absurd' men whose lucidity is revealed in such conversations as this:

'—Allons. Tarrou, dit-il, qu'est-ce qui vous pousse à vous occuper de cela?

—Je ne sais pas. Ma morale peut-être.

—Et laquelle?

—La compréhension'.²⁷

Camus will accept no consolation philosophy, and the lesson he teaches through them is the lesson of Sisyphus, freedom through lucidity. But the freedom of these two men is neither the sterile freedom of Meursault nor the inhuman freedom of the 'rebels' of the plays. Rieux and Tarrou differ fundamentally from Caligula and Marthe because their lucidity leads them not to a course of destruction but to dedicated service to humanity. They cling to one certainty, upheld by Camus himself in *Lettres à un ami allemand*: 'S'il y a un sens à la vie, c'est l'homme, car il est seul à en exiger.'

And so the portrayal of these characters and the dénouement of *La Peste* mark a significant change in the outlook of Camus. Paradoxically, he has been led through the ordeal of the Occupation to a creed of humanism which he formulates as follows:

Mais il savait cependant que cette chronique ne pouvait pas être celle de la victoire définitive. Elle ne pouvait être que le témoignage de ce qu'il avait fallu accomplir et que, sans doute, devraient accomplir encore, contre la terreur et son arme inlassable, malgré leurs déchirements personnels, tous les hommes qui, ne pouvant être des saints et refusant d'admettre les fléaux, s'efforcent cependant d'être des médecins.²⁸

The rats of *La Peste* are symbolic like the flies of Sartre; they will return to invade human citadels, but, as P.-H. Simon says, 'Les hommes ensemble auront lutté, connu la joie des victoires

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relatives et trouvé un chemin du bonheur qui passe par l'amour'.²⁹

A third novel, *La Chute*, appeared recently. This 'recit', as the author prefers to call it, is the confessional monologue of a man who styles himself a 'juge-pénitent'.

Although *La Chute* appears a complete departure in style and thematic material from *L'Etranger* and *La Peste*, it can be seen on closer analysis to continue the main line of thinking followed by Camus up to *L'Homme révolté*. The theme is the familiar one never far from the centre of his philosophy—lucidity. But what makes *La Chute* appear startlingly different from the preceding novels is that the notion of 'clairvoyance', hitherto somewhat oversimplified, is here considered in so far as it impinges on the personal life of a character, Clamence, and brings about a radical change in his behaviour and attitude to life.

A further link with Camus' thesis is that Clamence experiences in the incident of the drowning girl a 'moment de conscience', the mocking laugh being, as M. Gaëtan Picon aptly terms it, 'le rire de la lucidité'. Up to this point, the judge has been the champion of the helpless, the widows and the orphans, in short, a charitable, esteemed and successful man. In the searching light of the 'clairvoyance' now accorded him, he sees his life as a monument of egotism. His charity was personal vanity, his most admired actions the result of self-interest.

La Peste contains no such subtle analysis of motives as this. Whilst one understands that Rieux is activated by lucidity, Camus does not examine the *inner* reasons for his devotion to the plague-stricken of Oran. Had Rieux searched his conscience as Clamence does, he might well have discovered the worm of self-pride at the centre of all his activity.

The confession of Clamence is, however, not accompanied by humility; he is not a 'pénitent' but a 'juge-pénitent'. And he relates his story in a way calculated to make his listeners feel that he is holding the mirror up to them and laying bare their own petty and egocentric lives. He is the critic of his critics. Aware of his own falseness, he arrogantly refuses to accept the falseness of others.

The burden of Camus' criticism—and here we note a reversal of his belief in the innocence of man—is that all men are implicated in the universal evil. 'Du reste,' writes Camus, 'nous ne pouvons affirmer l'innocence de personne, tandis que nous pouvons affirmer à coup sûr la culpabilité de tous'.³⁰ But when they, like Clamence, come to this bitter realization, where do they stand? In the barren wastes of lucidity anticipated by Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. That is why M. Gaëtan Picon describes *La Chute* as a negative work.³¹

Camus' preoccupation with lucidity would seem then to have led him to a moral impasse. He has pursued a relentless argument from *L'Etranger* to *La Chute* and there is a clear link between the early Meursault and his latest character. The judge is a highly sophisticated person capable of both analysing and judging his actions. Meursault was capable only of analysis; at no stage does he sit in judgment on himself.

Is it possible to go beyond *La Chute* or will this novel prove the end point of Camus' 'rigoureuse méditation morale?'

The application of value-judgments to his own and others' actions has produced a distinctly frank and challenging story. *La Chute* is a significant human document at one time admonitory and (one senses) self-confessional. Camus is perhaps deflating the man whom many have hailed as the voice of post-war Europe. This latest work will doubtless disappoint many readers who since *La Peste* were looking to him to present a positive and optimistic picture of man. Through it, however, runs the belief in something that transcends the 'moi-moi-moi' of the 'juge-pénitent'.

NOTES

¹ S. John, Image and Symbol in the Work of Albert Camus, *French Studies*, January, 1955.

² S. John, Albert Camus, *Modern Languages*, December, 1954: 'The recent English translation of Camus' *L'Homme révolté* provoked a number of extravagant estimates of this talented French author and succeeded in distracting attention from what is, surely, his chief claim upon our interest: his power as an imaginative writer.'

³ Robert de Luppé, *Albert Camus*, (Editions du temps présent), p. 67.

⁴ *L'Homme révolté*, pp. 13-14, 'Le propos de cet essai est une fois de plus d'accepter la réalité du moment, qui est le crime logique, et d'en examiner précisément les justifications: ceci est un effort pour comprendre mon temps. On estimera peut-être qu'une époque qui, en cinquante ans, déracine, asservit ou tue soixante-dix millions d'êtres humains doit seulement, et d'abord, être jugée. Encore faut-il que sa culpabilité soit comprise.'

⁵ *Voie royale*, p. 157.

⁶ *La Révolte des Ecrivains d'aujourd'hui*, (Correa), p. 12.

⁷ Baudelaire, *Critical Studies*, p. 189.

⁸ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 23.

⁹ Explication de *L'Etranger*, *Situations*, I.

¹⁰ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 27.

¹¹ Vide *L'Etranger*, p. 34.

¹² *Situations*, I, p. 109.

¹³ *Noces*, *L'Eté à Alger*, pp. 47 and 64.

¹⁴ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 167.

¹⁵ *L'Etranger*, p. 159.

¹⁶ Vide *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, pp. 20-21.

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- ¹⁷ *Caligula*, (Gallimard), pp. 110-111.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.
²⁰ *Le Malentendu*, p. 68 (*Le Malentendu* suivi de *Caligula*, Gallimard).
²¹ *Caligula*, Act I, p. 118.
²² *La Peste*, p. 157.
²³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.
²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.
²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.
²⁶ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 93.
²⁷ *La Peste*, p. 147.
²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.
²⁹ P.-H. Simon, *Témoins de l'Homme* (Lib. Armand Colin), p. 191.
³⁰ *La Chute*, p. 127.
³¹ *Lettres (La Chute)*, Mercure de France août 1956.
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L'INFLUENCE GRECQUE SUR LA POESIE LATINE DE CATULLE A OVIDE—six exposés et discussions, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique, II, Vandœuvres, Genève, 1956, 262 pages, English price 35s.

In this second series of discussions (the first, published in 1954, dealt with *La notion du divin depuis Homère jusqu'à Platon*) another panel of scholars of international reputation is assembled. Jean Bâyet discusses Catullus. Augusto Rostagni *L'influenza greca sulle origini dell' elegia latina*, Victor Pöschl Horace, Friedrich Klingner Virgil, Pierre Boyancé Propertius and L. P. Wilkinson Ovid. After each paper is printed the ensuing discussion. In these, as in the papers, each participant speaks his own language. The *entretiens* occupied six days in August 1953.

Members of A.U.L.L.A. may hesitate to acquire, or to recommend to libraries, a book demanding the knowledge of four modern languages, as well as Latin and Greek. But this is an important book. It consolidates a long and slow emancipation from the great editors of the 1880's, for whom Roman literature was entirely derivative. 'Am Ende [des 19. Jahrhunderts]' says Klingner, 'schien nichts übrig zu bleiben als Nachgeahmtes, Dichtung aus zweiter Hand, griechischer Einfluss.' There seemed nothing left in Roman poetry to make it worth reading. 'Griechischer Einfluss: das ist Stoff' begins Klingner's vigorous refutation. The Roman poet's *milieu* is different, the uses to which he puts the common cloth complex and various: neutral acceptance of styles that have stood the test of time, open rivalry with the Hellenic master, evocation so subtle that in both reader and poet it works in regions bordering on the sub-conscious.

By a happy contrast of personalities, the six approaches differ a good deal. Bayet stresses the social background. Boyancé, confining himself to literature, emphasizes the Homeric and heroic influences on Propertius—

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generally considered the most Alexandrian of the Roman personal poets. Pöschl on Horace studies the complicated interplay in this poet (so often damned for lifeless imitation of Greek) between self-expression (*Selbstbekenntnis*) and literary tradition. Rostagni deals with a whole *genre*—Roman elegy—and drives the last nails in the coffin of Leo's infamous thesis. Wilkinson's paper is the most formalistic, but it has served as the basis for a graceful book (*Ovid Recalled*, 1955).

The discussions vary in quality. The best follow the papers on Virgil and Propertius. The latter solicited some acute observations on a feature of Propertius' style—*Ungenauigkeit* Klingner calls it, a word which Bayet interprets as 'imprécision, ou plutôt "non-coïncidence" entre le signifiant et le signifié'—a departure from the 'classical' tradition of precise focus that puzzles more than it need those who overlook its re-employment in contemporary poetry.

K.F.Q.

THE LYCIAN SHORE. Freya Stark. London, John Murray; pp. xi and 204; numerous photographs and line drawings; map; price 25s.

Miss Stark, long famous for her Arabian travels, has recently turned her attention to the west coast of Asia Minor, a land better known to European travellers, but still offering the chance of new discovery to the explorer among the relics of antiquity that crowd around its choked and deserted harbours. This book 'was to have been merely the straightforward tale of a journey, made in 1952 from the gulf of Smyrna round the south-west corner of Asia Minor, with David Balfour' (the British Consul-general) 'in his motor-sail-boat Elfin'. But Miss Stark was then reading the history of Alexander the Great, and was led on to try 'to discover what Alexander found in men's minds when he marched down from the Granicus in 334 B.C.' If she has not done this, she has at least given a very pleasant account of her own musings on antiquity, though her mind often carried her far from Lycia—to Corcyra with Iphicrates or to Egypt with Mentor the Rhodian. The reader may have some difficulty in placing all the characters who appear and disappear, even with the help of a table of 'Dates for the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.'

On this voyage, and on a later one to which she refers, Miss Stark passed by the great centres of Ionian civilization, Ephesus and Miletus. Caria and Lycia, though they had learned something of Greek culture long before Alexander, were in the Greek world but not of it, the home of tough adventurers who might be either pirates or mercenaries as occasion served. But the Dorian Greek cities of the coast were not far behind Ionia in literature and art. At Halicarnassus, Miss Stark was led to reflect that the 'tolerance' of Herodotus may have grown from his birth in 'a Greek capital for Carian kings' where 'the Greek and barbarian fusion—the single world of Alexander's dream—was already in a small way accomplished'. And it was the wife of one of the same kings who, a hundred years after Herodotus's time, called the greatest Greek artists of her day to the building of one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Mausoleum.

Of the present inhabitants of the land we are given some entertaining and sympathetic pictures—a village circumcision feast; cotton pickers; village schoolmasters, well-meaning but unable to prevent the continual destruction of ancient monuments; soldiers on coastguard duty, torn between fear of the regulations and fear of offending those who boldly disregarded them. But it is not only Turkish soldiers who are bound by regulations, and Miss Stark has a sad note on the ending of the long line of honorary British Consuls at Samos.

The gulf between the ancient world and our own is bridged with pleasant reminiscences of Turkish pashas, the Knights of St John, and the posthumous adventures of St Nicholas of Bari. Or perhaps not 'bridged'; Miss Stark

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does not offer us a bridge or continuous path leading to any definite destination, but a scattered archipelago, which we can visit with enjoyment and profit. The illustrations are many and good.

J.K.A.

ESSAYS AND STUDIES 1956, being volume nine of the new series of Essays and Studies collected for the English Association by Sir George Rostrevor Hamilton. London, John Murray. pp. 121. 12s. 6d.

In a historical note in this issue to mark the fiftieth jubilee of the English Association, Arundell Esdaile mentions that the aim of *Essays and Studies* is to provide 'a series of short (but not therefore elementary) papers by scholars expert each in some period or aspect of English language or literature, care being taken to make the range of each volume wide and representative'. This aim seems to be fulfilled. In the present volume topics range from fourteenth century to twentieth century literature, from the art of radio listening to the first illustrator of *Paradise Lost*, and the contributors include Dobrée on drama, R. M. Wilson on Middle English literature and T. R. Henn on Yeats.

Some of the contributions are weightier than others (the distinction is perhaps between the 'essays' and the 'studies'). Kate O'Brien is in the essay tradition in her discussion of *Writers of Letters*. Successfully she takes up a chatty attitude: 'With the epistolary writings of ancient worlds we are not concerned here, because—an excellent reason—I am totally unacquainted with them'. The result is not a brief history of letter writing nor an analysis of the letter as literature but an amusing little article which leaves us feeling 'My word, I must read a few of Walpole's letters one of these days'. This 'infectious appreciation' seems to be less frequent now than it was a half a century ago, perhaps a pity, since the need for bridging the gap between writers and the public is certainly not less. Other essays are reminiscences of Oxford in the years 1881-1886 by Dr F. R. Boas, and Dobrée's article *On (not) Enjoying Shakespeare*. This is a discussion of modern approaches to Shakespearian criticism in dialogue form, serious enough in content with attempted lightness in presentation. But such dialogues are perhaps never quite successful, since the necessary pursuit of the argument makes natural conversation impossible.

The 'studies' include *The Novel as Literary Kind* by E. M. W. Tillyard, essentially an examination of what kinds of prose writing the term is made to include; *Three Middle English Mystics* by R. M. Wilson, a study of the writings of Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe with emphasis on their prose style; and an analysis of Yeats' *Last Poems* by T. R. Henn. This examination of Yeats suggests an alternative to the psycho-analytic approach of Vivienne Koch, interpreting the *Last Poems* in the light of Yeats' own symbolic system and his reading of Blake, Dante, Shakespeare, Swift and Morris.

Some of these essays and studies are of permanent reference value. But the variety of contents suggests a number of a periodical rather than a unified book, and perhaps both periodicals and such books suggest the need for an abstracting service for modern languages and literature.

G.W.T.

A LETTER TO LUCIAN AND OTHER POEMS. Alfred Noyes. London, John Murray, 1956. pp. ix, 102. 10s. 6d.

Such writers as James Joyce and Edith Sitwell are pretty well accepted nowadays and hardly referred to as 'moderns' any more. But Mr Noyes, as

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he made very clear in his autobiographical *Two Worlds for Memory*, does not accept them nor any of the innovations associated with them. He stands, he says, for traditional poetry. In fact, of course, the writers he opposes also claim to be traditional. Eliot (the very word 'tradition' calls up his name) is at pains to point out that tradition does not merely consist 'in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes'.

Mr Noyes has undoubted technical skill in handling established metres, even to the hexameter used in the title poem. This leads to successful light verse of a diffuse, easy-going sort without the paradox and wit we have come to expect of poetry nowadays, and it does not prevent success in the 'childhood' type of verse in which Walter de la Mare excelled:

I met an old postman
In a dark street.
He'd a lamp at his belt,
And rainpools at his feet.

But in his serious verse he again paradoxically reverses roles with the moderns he attacked. Early writers of free verse were charged with arriving at something indistinguishable from prose. But it is this 'traditional' verse which, rhymes and metre apart, resembles prose because words are used prosaically, each with its literal surface meaning. The effect is not necessarily unpoetic—

With blossom, first, the boughs grew white,
Then black with cherry on cherry . . .

—but this sort of verse can only be serious if there is general agreement on the values of words, particularly abstract words. Such agreement has failed in our time.

He met the great new darkness with a mind
Unstained by what the foul new gods had said;
For he was faithful, clean of heart, and kind,
And some, who loved him, wept when he was dead.

There would not be agreement on the meaning of 'foul new gods' nor 'clean of heart'. This verse, then, is likely to appeal only to those who already agree with the values held by the poet. In contrast the reader of Dr Sitwell's lines

Dark as the world of man, black as our loss—
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails
Upon the Cross—

is stirred whatever his intellectual attitude to Christianity.

G.W.T.

L'ÂME DE LA POESIE CANADIENNE FRANCAISE. Rièse, Laure. Toronto, Macmillan, pp. xxxi, 263.

The editor of this anthology, Associate-Professor of French at Victoria University, Toronto, has faced a difficult task with vigour and clarity. As she remarks, French Canadian literature, emerging from a frontier mentality and a lumberjack tradition, can scarcely be compared with the mature and traditional literature that found French expression in Belgium and Switzerland. Its early expression, like that of the ballad period in Australian verse, was rustic, strong and naïve, while its 'second' period (1850-1893) and its 'third' (1895-1920) remained, in a sense, derivative, inspired by contemporary and earlier French poetry (though the Canadians, in the name of religious values, claimed affiliations with pre-revolutionary France). Thus Gautier is echoed in Lozeau, Chénier in Choquette, Baudelaire in Eva Sénécal, Paul Fort in Simone Routier.

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It is only in more recent years that this French Canadian poetry has achieved strength, compression and universality. Choquette's 'Metropolitan Museum', a miniature 'Légende des siècles' and inspired by Verhaeren, has the vigour of Whitman and something of the evocatory power of Hugo. Saint-Denys-Gorneau, in a form reminiscent of Paul Eluard, sings memorably of the loneliness and frustrations of mortal being, while René Chopin, mature and powerful, an expert craftsman in verse, has wonderful insight and a real verbal 'density'. This Canadian poetry has rich promise in it, and an anthology of this type places its whole development in proper focus. The book well repays careful study.

R.T.S.

LOUIS XV. The Monarchy in Decline. G. P. Gooch. Longmans, Green and Co. 1956. pp. ix, 285.

Dr Gooch appears in this work to have a double aim in view. In the first place, he studies in some detail the character and history of that enigmatic figure, Louis XV. In the second place, he attempts to show how far Louis' qualities (or defects) were responsible for the gradual decline of the power and prestige of the French monarchy. This entails an extensive and well informed survey of the political and social history of his reign, and a discussion of its leading personalities.

In thus trying to assess the impact of a personality on a period, Dr Gooch has set himself a task of considerable magnitude. He brings to it an admirable fund of scholarship, and a noteworthy ability to give the essence of a character in a phrase. That in spite of this the central figure remains shadowy is probably as much the fault of Louis XV himself as of Dr Gooch. It is however a serious weakness in the total design of the book, which remains as a result confused and not quite convincing. This effect is increased by the fact that the material used is not always sifted and arranged to the best advantage. This is a pity, as one tends in the mass of conflicting facts and personalities to lose sight of many of the author's more interesting conclusions. The book is none the less a useful one, which a little more *clarté* and highlighting of important points might have made outstanding.

N.M.L.

DES ERDBALLS LETZTES INSELRIFF. J. A. Asher. Max Hueber Verlag, München, 1956.

This little book, published as Nr. 1 of the Lehrmittel-Reihe des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen in Stuttgart, is a most commendable contribution to the efforts to create conditions in New Zealand, in which European languages can be taught as live subjects. It contains selections from three German writers, Georg Forster, Ernst Dieffenbach and Karl Wolfskehl, describing their experiences in New Zealand. It should therefore prove an excellent reader in New Zealand schools, and could probably be used to advantage with University classes.

If the aim of the book deserves the highest praise, the selection and balance present certain points for criticism. Of a total 63 pages of text, the selections from the writings of Georg Forster occupy 50: Dieffenbach's description of the climbing of Mt Egmont follows (pp. 59-64) and a selection from the letters and poems of Karl Wolfskehl (pp. 65-71). It might have been preferable to preserve the balance and unity of the book by concentrating entirely on Forster, whose accounts of New Zealand scenery and meetings with Maoris during the Cook expedition of 1773 are vivid, excitingly interesting for New Zealand students, and written in extremely fine German prose. Concentration on Forster would, of course, have detracted from the representative nature of this book as indicated in the sub-title,

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'Deutsche erleben Neuseeland', but do the few pages from Dieffenbach and Wolfskehl really make the selection representative of German writing on New Zealand, or, as is claimed in the Introduction, of the impact of New Zealand specifically on German literature? There is nothing here for instance of Hochstetter or von Haast, or other early explorers. It is suggested that the choice of authors was dictated by literary merit, and this would certainly apply in the cases of Forster and Wolfskehl; but it can hardly be maintained that the selection from Dieffenbach, which was originally written in English and has been translated by the Editor, 'zur eigentlichen deutschen Literatur etwas beigetragen hat'. The sub-title 'Deutsche erleben Neuseeland' would have been much more justified, had the Editor included, for instance, some letters by early German settlers in the Nelson and Auckland provinces.

In spite of these criticisms, this selection is an admirable first venture into the field of connecting the New Zealand scene with the study of German language and literature by a scholar who has played and is playing a leading role in the promotion of German studies in New Zealand.

E.W.H.

THE GERMAN NOVEL. Roy Pascal. *Manchester University Press*, 344 pp.

Professor Pascal has set himself a two-fold aim in writing this book, which caters not only for specialists, but also for 'readers who know no German'. Quotations from the books discussed are therefore given in English (with the German original sometimes included in the Appendix) and most, but not all, the titles have been translated. The desire to provide for readers who know no German has inevitably trapped the author into making certain perilous generalizations out of keeping with the scholarly tone of the book, e.g., his emphasis on the 'philistine monotony' (p. 301) in the lives of German novelists (except Goethe!), his description of Thomas Mann as 'the most representative German of this century' (p. 291) and his assertion that in German novels 'there is rarely any plot at all' (p. 303).

The specialist will find the chapters on Gottfried, Kafka and Mann in the Second Part of the book particularly rewarding. The author deals summarily with the extravagances of the Max Brod school of critics, and develops further the new directions given to Kafka research by scholars such as Beissner and Emrich. His interpretation of Kafka's novels is both cautious, original and understanding, and few will quarrel with his suggestion that the squalid courts in *Der Prozess* 'are the sanction of the actual world of society, the justification of the world as it is, acquiring reality and power only because they are believed in' (p. 232).

Chapter IX is a balanced and useful contribution to our understanding of Thomas Mann's genius, though it is less satisfying than the chapter on Kafka. This is because it tends to follow the conventional pattern in Mann criticism, and accepts one part of Mann's explanation of his writing, while it ignores or rejects the other. In maintaining that a moral thesis is 'explicit in all Mann's later works' (p. 267), Professor Pascal does not succeed in explaining away the image of the seismograph (p. 267) and ignores a host of parallel statements by Mann, e.g., in his letters to Kerényi: 'Ich bin ein Mensch des Gleichgewichts. Ich lehne mich instinktiv nach links, wenn der Kahn nach rechts zu kentern droht—und umgekehrt'. In believing that *Lotte in Weimar* shows 'a deliberate assimilation of the mature style and character of Goethe' (p. 287), Professor Pascal is completely dependent on earlier critics, especially Blume. Blume never attempted to prove by detailed reference to the text this 'assimilation of Goethe's style'. If the detailed comparison is made, it will be found that the reverse is true, and that Mann never approaches Goethe's style, except very occasionally in brilliant parody. It would be true to say that too many overall studies

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of Mann's genius have been written in recent years. There is as yet an insufficient body of detailed published research on which to base such general surveys, and it will be a long time yet before a truly satisfying analysis of Mann's genius is possible.

All in all, readers will be grateful to Professor Pascal for a cautious and—in general—discerning survey of eight of Germany's best-known novelists. Probably no student of German literature would have made exactly the same choice as the author, but in taking Goethe, Keller, Stifter, Gotthelf, Raabe, Fontane, Kafka and Mann, Professor Pascal has provided an understanding and digestible picture of the German novel over the last 150 years.

J.A.A.

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CONGRESS AT HOBART, FEBRUARY, 1957

The Fifth biennial Congress of A.U.M.L.A. was held at Hobart from January 29th to February 5th, 1957, and was attended by delegates from the Universities and University Colleges of Western Australia, Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Canberra, Sydney, Newcastle, Armidale, Queensland and Christchurch. A feature of the Congress was the attendance for the first time of representatives of the Departments of Classics, whose admission to the Association was formally ratified during the Congress. In this way all language studies in the Arts curriculum became united in one Association. Provision was made for four sections at the Congress—Classics, English, French and German—and a Russian section was also organized.

Affiliation with F.I.L.L.M. Preliminary discussions having already taken place, it was resolved that the Association seek affiliation with the *Fédération Internationale de Langues et Littératures Modernes*, and that the Honorary Secretary, Dr H. Maclean, be accredited as the official delegate of the Association to the Congress to be held at Heidelberg during 1957.

Name of the Association. For reasons of strategy as well as of sentiment it was resolved to retain unchanged the title of the Association's Journal AUMLA, but a new constitution was adopted embodying a change of the Association's name to 'Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association' (A.U.L.L.A.).

Honorary Life Membership. In view of their distinguished service given to the Association and to the cause of learning generally, it was resolved that an honorary life membership be conferred on Professor A. R. Chisholm (Past President) and Professor L. A. Triebel (President) on the occasion of their retirement from active University duties.

I.C.L.A. Congress. The Standing Committee was instructed to make arrangements for representation of the Association at the Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, to be held at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1958.

Travelling Scholarship Reciprocities. Further to the discussions of the Brisbane Congress (1955), and after consideration of provision already made in New Zealand for postgraduate scholarships tenable in that Dominion by French and German nationals, it was resolved to appoint a sub-committee to approach the Australian Government with a view to taking similar action in Australia.

Academic Visitors. A sub-committee was appointed to investigate and report on the general question of overseas academic visitors.

Next Congress. An invitation from the University of New England to hold a Congress there in January, 1959, was accepted. It was agreed that the general theme should be: 'The Twentieth Century—Literature, Criticism and Linguistic Studies'.

Election of Office-Bearers. The following officers were elected: President, Professor H. W. Piper; Vice-President, Professor R. T. Sussex; Secretary, Dr H. Maclean (Acting Secretary, Mr H. Wiemann); Treasurer, Mr R. P. Meijer (Acting Treasurer, Dr J. Smit); Council members, Dr K. Goesch, Professor H. K. Hunt, Dr D. van Abbé, Miss Jean Batt, Professor G. H. Russell, Mr A. King, Miss Isobel Blanch, Dr E. K. T. Koch-Emmery, Professor A. C. Keys, Mr D. C. Muecke, Mr P. K. Elkin.

Standing Committee: Professor R. T. Sussex, Dr H. Maclean, Mr R. P. Meijer.

Editorial Board: Professor R. T. Sussex (Editor), Professor I. H. Smith (Associate Editor), Mr K. F. Quinn, Dr J. Smit, Professor F. M. Todd.

Very warm thanks were expressed to Professor L. A. Triebel and to the members of staff of the University of Tasmania for their hospitality and for the smooth functioning of the Congress.



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